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**WOMEN VETERANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: TRANSITIONS AND  
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

by  
Jeffrey J. Kurz

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services, Administration, and Higher Education  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration

at

Rowan University

June 27, 2013

Thesis Chair: Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

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## **Dedication**

*To my wife, Cindy Kurz*

*To my loving parents, John and Ann Kurz*

*To all my family members who served in the United States military:*

*My father, John G. Kurz, 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, United States Army, Korean War era*

*My Uncle, Peter J. Russo, 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, United States Army, World War II*

*My Uncle, John Russo, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, United States Army, World War II, Killed in Action, June 1944*

*My Uncle, Albert Russo, United States Army, World War II*

*My Uncle, Edward Russo, Office of Strategic Services, World War II*

*My Great Grandfather (many generations past), Emil Frank, United States Navy,  
American Civil War*

*To all veterans and current military service members*

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There are so many people in my life that I would like to acknowledge and thank for all of their support during my time in graduate school. Without them, I would not be where I am today:

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My parents, for instilling the importance of education in my life, molding me into the person that I am today, and for their loving support.

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## Abstract

Jeffrey J. Kurz

### WOMEN VETERANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: TRANSITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

2012/2013

Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration

The purpose of this study was to evaluate women veteran transitions and transformative learning experiences at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and to replicate Dahan's (2008) study on student veterans conducted at Rowan University. The theoretical framework that guided this study was Mezirow's Transformative Theory, and Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Mattering Study to uncover various themes related to military experiences. A mixed-methods research design was used to understand transition and transformative learning experiences. A random sample of nine women veteran students was obtained from an internal college database provided by the Office of Veteran Affairs. Participants were asked to complete a Likert-type survey using a five-point scale to assess their attitudes of mattering on campus. Six interviews were conducted to uncover various themes of transition and transformative learning experiences. The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to input all quantitative data for the purpose of descriptive statistics. Sisco's (1981) *Rules and Procedures for Logical Analysis of Written Data* were used as a tool for all content analysis in this study. The findings in this study support Dahan's (2008) study that women student veterans perceive that they matter and are satisfied with veteran specific services on campus. The findings also suggest that women student veterans encountered varied transformative learning experiences while in the military.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

*“We are dealing with Veterans, not procedures; with their problems, not ours”  
-Omar M. Bradley, Administrator of Veteran Affairs, 1945-1947,  
Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents (2002)*

*“Women who have served in the U.S. military are often referred to as “invisible Veterans” because their service contributions until the 1970s went largely unrecognized by politicians, the media, academia, and the general public.”  
-The Veterans Administration, America’s Women Veterans (2011)*

#### **Statement of the Problem**

In a brief report, Foster (2010) cited a series of challenges and needs that California’s women face when returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although some women may face a smooth transition from the military to civilian life, a majority still have an uphill battle in returning home. Foster discusses five major areas that directly impact women veterans: recognition and respect, support and family, physical and mental health, housing and homelessness, and employment and education. In a survey conducted by the California Research Bureau, 45% of 170 participants reported “that they came back facing the same, or many of the same, transition issues as their male counterparts, their experiences indicate that they faced specific issues related to their gender” (Foster, 2010, p. 1).

Specifically, Foster (2010) points out that women reported feelings of isolation from their peers, a lack of recognition for their military service, problems connecting with other women veterans, and a reluctance to join campus groups due to negative reactions of service in the military. As cited by the Veterans Administration, a report from the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, over half of female enlisted and officer servicemembers were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since September 11, 2001. Of those women who had been deployed, 44% of enlisted and 13% of officers were deployed two or more times ([www.va.gov/vetdata](http://www.va.gov/vetdata)). Although women primarily served in support roles during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, exposure to combat situations is uniquely different than their peers who served in other conflicts ([www.va.gov/vetdata](http://www.va.gov/vetdata)).

Additionally, women veterans struggle with health issues and psychological challenges such as military sexual trauma (MST), traumatic brain injury (TBI), harassment, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Challenges such as these may have an impact on the ability of women veterans to transition from the military to higher education. Although their male counterparts may also experience such challenges, the unique needs of women veterans, transition experiences, and transformative learning experiences must be understood.

Equally important is that in 2009, 284,000 women veterans used their Montgomery G.I. Bill education benefits. However, the Veterans Administration (VA) does not have any gender-specific statistics on the use of the 9/11 G.I. Bill. The VA notes that at the time of America's Women Veterans report, produced in August 2009, the

above mentioned statistics are currently unavailable ([www.va.gov/vetdata](http://www.va.gov/vetdata)). Therefore, as more women return from the military and enroll in higher education, the opportunity to evaluate their G.I. Bill education benefits is ripe.

### **Significance of the Study**

The Veterans Administration estimates that the total population of women veterans is expected to increase 11,000 per year for the next 20 years ([www.va.gov/vetdata](http://www.va.gov/vetdata)). Research of women veterans and their transition and transformative learning experiences is largely scant. As cited by Rumann (2010), Baechtold and De Sawal (2009), wrote that the number of women veterans is also expected to increase; yet, there have been few empirical studies investigating their experiences. Further research focusing on student veterans who are women is critical because of the additional gender-related stressors they might face as a result of returning from their deployment and enrolling in college (Rumann, 2010). A majority of the research is based on the experiences of male and female veterans, but not on female veterans alone. Perhaps a deeper understanding of women veterans' transition and transformative learning experiences will assist higher education institutions to understand their unique needs.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was (a) evaluate women veterans' transformative learning and transition experiences upon discharge from the United States Armed Services and those currently enlisted at the time of this study, and (b) replicate Dahan's (2008) study on student veterans conducted at Rowan University. The theoretical framework that guided this study was Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, and Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Mattering Study to uncover various themes related to military experiences. Research focused on variables such as participants' attitudes of the institution serving their unique educational needs; lived experiences while in the military; transition experiences from the military to higher education; if there was a feeling that they mattered to the institution; and transformative learning experiences in relation to military service and enrollment in a four-year college. Demographics included military rank, age, full-time or part-time enrollment, G.I. Bill education chapter, college major, and years of service while in the military.

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

The percentage of women currently serving in the Armed Forces is at 15%. The research location has a small sample size of women student veterans. Overall, 350 veterans are currently enrolled at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and of that number, 30 women veterans (approximately 11% of the population) were identified via an internal college database. Although a low number, the institution is somewhat identical to the current military enlistment of women veterans in the United States Armed Forces.



Of equal concern is that women veterans' shared limited information during the interview process. Specifically, personal information in relation to military service, for example, incidents of discrimination, harassment, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may have been uncomfortable for women veterans to disclose while possibly triggering emotional responses. A total of six interviews were conducted; three spanning five minutes; one spanning 55 minutes; and two spanning 25 minutes. Due to the varied interview times, a deeper understanding of women veterans and overall rapport may have had an impact on the qualitative results.

A major limitation of this study is the quantitative results. Dahan's (2008) study had a total sample size of 51 subjects. For this study, a total of nine surveys from a sample of 30 were completed during the Spring 2013 semester yielding an overall response rate of 33.3%. Due to the small sample size, results cannot be generalized to the larger population of women student veterans enrolled at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, and other institutions nationwide. It is possible that some of the women veterans may have been deployed at the time of this study.

**Operational Definitions:**

1. Full-time student: Currently attending student who is enrolled for 12 or more credits in spring 2013 at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.
2. Mattering: Refers to the beliefs people have, whether right or wrong, that they matter to someone else, that they are the object of someone else's attention, and that others care about them and appreciate them (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1999).

3. Military Occupational Specialties (MOS): Term for the various jobs available to those who enlist in the United States Armed Forces.
4. Part-time student: Currently attending student who is enrolled for 1-11 credits in spring 2013 at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.
5. Transition: For the purpose of this study, a period of time from when a woman veteran is (a) discharged from active duty to the time of enrollment in college, or (b) currently serving in the United States Armed Forces and enrolled in college.
6. Transformative learning: According to Cranton (2006):

Transformative learning theory is based on constructivist assumptions. In other words, meaning is seen to exist within ourselves, not in external forces. We develop or construct personal meaning from our experience and validate it through interaction and communication with others. What we make of the world is a result of our perceptions and experiences. If we were to claim the existence of absolute truths or universal constructs that are independent of our knowledge of them, the goal of learning is a process of examining, questioning, validating, and revising our perspectives. (p. 23)

7. United States Armed Forces: A collective defense force operating under the direction of the President of the United States, The Department of Defense (DoD), and The Department of Homeland Security. To include the National Guard, United States Army, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Navy, Air Force, and United States Armed Forces Reserve units.

8. Women Student Veterans: Students who served or are currently serving in the United States Armed Forces and attending college full-time or part-time at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey during the 2012-2013 Academic Year.

### **Research Questions**

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What do selected Richard Stockton College women student veterans report regarding the five focus areas of mattering on the college campus?
2. What are the transformative learning and transition experiences of women student veterans?
3. What are the educational and social needs of returning women veterans?
4. How well do women student veterans report that Stockton is meeting those needs?
5. What recommendations do they make to improve services to women veterans returning to the college environment?

### **Overview of the Study**

Chapter II reviews the literature pertaining to the study and begins with a historical background of women in the military, the legislative history of the GI Bill, and theoretical models of transition and transformative learning. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature review.

Chapter III describes the context of the study, population, sample size, data collection instruments, how instruments were judged to be reliable and valid, procedures

for gathering data, and information on the protection of human subjects in compliance with federal law.

Chapter IV includes research findings based on the research questions mentioned in Chapter I.

Chapter V provides a summary and discussion of major research findings, conclusions based on findings, and the extent to which research questions were answered, and recommendations for practice and further research.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Related Literature**

A brief history of the G.I. Bill, the role of women in America's major military conflicts, and general life in the military is presented in this chapter. It is important to note that although women mainly served in vital support roles, their pioneering efforts paved the way for future generations. Women veterans who took advantage of education benefits directly impacted their careers and the future of those who had children, thus, producing generations of educated citizens.

As cited by the Women's Memorial Foundation, the Department of Defense (DoD) reported in September 2011 that of the 1,468,364 active duty service members, 214,098 or 14.6% of that total are women. A total of 608,494 serve in the Reserves and of that number 118,871 or 19.5% are women. The Army National Guard and Air National Guard are at 470,851 total service members and of that number 72,790 or 15.5% are women. Although a male dominated institution, the totals reveal that women are generally a minority in the United States Armed Forces.

Raddatz and Gorman (2009) reported that in 2009 10,000 women served in Iraq and more than 4,000 served in Afghanistan. A PBS News Hour report by Judy Woodruff, aired on July 5, 2007, centered on the role of women in combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Woodruff, "American women are serving in the United States military today in ways and numbers unthinkable a few decades ago. They are now

eligible to fill more than 80 percent of military jobs, 250,000 different assignments, often serving side-by-side with men” (www.pbs.org).

Due to the “non-existent battle line” in Iraq and Afghanistan, women are often exposed to immediate combat situations. As medics, intelligence officers, truck drivers, and pilots, women are serving in more combat roles than ever before. According to *The New York Times*, statistics show that women have been directly impacted by combat conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Approximately 800 or more women had been wounded in both wars and over 130 had died (www.newyorktimes.com). As of this research study, the 1994 Pentagon rule that restricts women from specific combat jobs has been lifted by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. Mr. Panetta’s decision came in response to recommendations from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In a January 9, 2013 letter, General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs wrote, the time has come to rescind the direct combat exclusion rule for women and to eliminate all unnecessary gender-based barriers to service (www.newyorktimes.com). Although the new policy may take an unknown time getting used to, women are already serving in units close to combat situations. However, supporters and critics of the new policy abound.

In a January 2013 article, *The New York Times* cited a nationwide poll conducted by Quinnipiac University that found three-quarters of voters surveyed favored allowing women to serve in units close to combat, if they wanted to. In response to the new policy, *The New York Times* article also reported the sentiments of United States Senators and one military general. Senator Carl Levin stated, “It reflects the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century military operations;” Senator Patty Murray, chairwoman of the Senate Veterans Affairs

Committee, said it is a “historic step for recognizing the role women have, and will continue to play in the defense of our nation;” and General Boykin quipped, “the people making this decision are doing so as part of another social experiment. He pointed to the Special Forces where “living conditions are primal in many situations with no privacy for personal hygiene or normal functions” (www.nytimes.com).

In the context of higher education, research into the unique needs and experiences of women veterans’ is largely scant. As cited by Rumann (2010), “the number of women veterans is expected to increase; yet there have been few empirical studies investigating their experiences. Further research focusing on women veterans is critical because of the additional gender-related stressors they might face as a result of returning from their deployment and enrolling in college” (p. 192). Thus, to better understand the lived experiences of women, how they learn in the classroom, and the various education benefits available to them is essential. An overview of the *Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944* (G.I. Bill), the *Post 9/11 G.I. Bill*, and women’s historical impact throughout various military conflicts is necessary. Additionally, as women veterans’ transition from the military to civilian life, and into higher education, support services must be addressed to meet their unique needs.

### **Legislative History of the G.I. Bill**

Warren H. Atherton, “The Father of the G.I. Bill,” was an ardent activist in the plight to bring seamless government support to veterans returning from war. A veteran himself, Atherton fought in WWI under General Pershing and returned to civilian life where he began a career as an attorney in California. From 1935-1960 Atherton served as

general counsel for the California Department of Veteran Affairs, and during WWII, as National Commander of the American Legion. At his post in the American Legion (the Legion), Atherton gained notoriety when he petitioned Congress for immediate legislative action to assist veterans returning from war and transitioning into civilian life. The road to success would lead Atherton on a long journey to witness the passage of the *Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944* (commonly referred to as the G.I. Bill of Rights).

Atherton was keenly aware of the myriad of problems veterans encountered when returning home from the battlefields of WWII. He was particularly concerned, as in previous wars, that government assistance was lax in "readjusting" veterans to civilian life. Although a minority of veterans had some success in "readjusting" from soldier to civilian, a majority of those did not. Atherton pointed to "visibly disabled" veterans who could barely care for themselves after wounds received during military service. Thousands of men were being discharged with little or no support from the government. Pitken (1969) reported that "disabled men were being discharged with precious little being done for them while others were in terrible need" (p. 25).

In 1943, Francis Sullivan, the Legion's Acting Legislative Director, conveyed to Atherton that the most urgent problem was to do something now and not later. Thousands of veterans were returning home penniless and without support and care, military records were in disarray while others were destroyed in battle on land or at sea (Pitken, 1969). At the time, under existing laws, services were rejected if military records were not complete. The result was a back log of service pay a year or more behind and inadequate care for veterans.



Atherton and the Legion envisioned bigger plans for veteran services. On the table was a list of resolutions that would prod the government to take legislative action. Among the list were education benefits; job training; home and farm loans; and special training for the disabled. Atherton was aware that Congress was already considering much of the Legion's resolutions, but a major problem worried him—each of the resolutions (now bills) lay with separate committees. If this approach continued, then each bill would remain with separate Congressional committees such as education, disability services, employment, and home and farm mortgages. Atherton called on Congress to reconsider introducing one bill, not separate bills among several committees.

Atherton and the Legion's greatest fear was that some bills would be approved while others would simply "die" with one committee. To allay these fears, Atherton continued to press Congress to review all of the Legion's resolutions within one committee and to authorize the Veterans Administration to coordinate all services under one umbrella of care. If Congress continued along the same path as in WWI, where separate agencies administered veterans' benefits, then the result would prove disastrous (Pitken, 1969).

As Atherton and his loyal supporters pressed forward, opposition to the G.I. Bill of Rights mounted. Opponents viewed the bill as a "handout" to veterans. Their largest source of contention was with the "52-20" plan where veterans' would receive \$20 per week for 52 weeks of unemployment benefits. Millard Rice of the Disabled American Veterans felt as though returning veterans would "sit back on their rumps for a solid year while drawing \$20 a week before stirring themselves" (as cited in Pitken, 1969, p. 24).

Atherton and the Legion, however, believed that the “52-20” plan would be used by veterans temporarily for job training, prior to enrolling in college, or looking for employment opportunities. To avoid the stigma of the “lazy” veteran, the focus was to get them back on their feet to support themselves, their children, and their families.

According to Pitken (1969), the 52-20 plan was based on the soundest state unemployment laws in existence. “And in the end the WWII veterans did not use half of their 52-20 entitlement, while a bare handful took the full 52 weeks. Millions of veterans never used the 52-20 entitlement” (p. 24).

The final days of debates of the G.I. Bill in Congressional committee proved to be contentious. A deadlock in the House and Senate ensued on Title IV of the bill-veterans job placement. The Senate supported job placement services to remain with the United States Employment Agency (USES), “with control exercised by a board by which the Administrator of Veterans Affairs was chairman” (Pitkin, 1969). However, the House of Representatives wanted the Veterans Administration to control job placement services that would ultimately create a new and separate agency much like the USES and state systems (Pitken, 1969, p. 48).

The reality was that if a majority of both the House and Senate committee members did not agree, then the G.I. Bill would ultimately be scrapped and perhaps never come to fruition. In the end, three House members backed off support of their plan and accepted the Senate’s version of the bill. On June 24, 1944, the G.I. Bill became a reality when Franklin D. Roosevelt signed it into law. About to begin was a new life for veterans returning from WWII. Millions of veterans returned to take advantage of the new law,

especially the education benefits. Six million veterans would enter the classrooms of colleges and universities. The “Greatest Generation” was on its way to move the nation toward a new beginning.

### **The G.I. Bill and Female Veterans: A Brief History**

In 1944, World War II came to a close. Millions of veterans, the majority of men, returned home eager to regain their civilian jobs, social roles, and take advantage of the new G.I. Bill. Women veterans were also looking forward not only for a place in the job market, but to apply and receive the various benefits of the G.I. Bill, which included education aid, housing loans, and access to financial credit. No distinction was made between male veterans and female veterans to acquire G.I. Bill benefits. The reality, however, was quite different. Many servicewomen knew little or nothing about the benefits of the G.I. Bill prior to discharge from the military. Surveys completed after the war confirmed that a third of women reported that they had no idea they were eligible for G.I. Bill benefits (Humes, 2006).

According to the legislation, benefits were available for female veterans who served in special military divisions (non-combat) such as the Women’s Army Corps (WAC), Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), Marine Corps Women’s Reserve, and Women’s Coast Guard Auxiliary. However, due to a technicality in the legislation women who served in the first two years of the WAC received no benefits (Humes, 2006). In 1980, the government corrected this technicality, but it was too late for WAC veterans to use their benefits because they had expired. On another note, the G.I. Bill stipulated that when a married serviceman died, then benefits would be

transferred to their wife. Widowers were given no such benefits and the financial security that should have helped them was denied.

Women veterans who were aware of the G.I. Bill benefits and attempted to use them faced discrimination in the banking industry and institutions of higher education (Humes, 2006). In the area of banking, women attempted to secure home loans for themselves, but because of their gender they were unable to do so. According to Humes (2006), “When working women sought veterans’ home loans, they were forced to submit demeaning testimonials, such as letters and doctors’ notes attesting to the fact that they could or would not have children either because of sterility or the use of birth control” (p. 205). Males, however, were not subjected to any such practices.

The G.I. Bill is often cited as one of the best pieces of social legislation that not only opened the doors of higher education, but expanded college enrollments nationwide. Six million veterans, who prior to World War II, had a high school diploma or less, were now college educated. Although women did attend college albeit at lower rates than men, the percentages speak for themselves. The percentage of men who obtained a college degree went from 6% to 10% while women moved from 5% to 6% (Humes, 2006).

College admissions policies were not kind to women. Personnel charged with making admissions decisions gave preference to male veterans. The direct effect of these admissions policies not only widened the education gap between males and females, but enhanced discriminatory practices that kept women in their inferior social roles.

Humes (2006) further explains that social labels or stigmas permeated in the public and in Congress. The public was presented with rumors that females joined the

military “because they were lesbians or were promiscuous and thus be cast as camp followers or camp wives” (Humes, 2006, p. 206). In Congress, certain members were unhappy with females serving in the military, especially in combat. These same members also opposed soldier vote legislation (allowing soldiers to cast absentee ballots in the election of 1944 while overseas) and color-blind G.I. Bill benefits (benefits for all races). The belief here was that a color-blind G.I. Bill would undermine segregation and anger those who wanted to keep the status-quo (Humes, 2006). Furthermore, it was frowned upon for women to do a “man’s job.” At the time, it was accepted for women to fulfill “feminine roles” in the military as secretaries, orderlies, and nurses. Thus, institutions responsible for adhering to the G.I. Bill, a federal law, enhanced gender, social, educational, and racial inequality. Although women had difficulty securing G.I. Bill benefits, oral histories have uncovered different experiences and success stories. Some women went on to buy homes and secure careers in teaching, nursing, and other fields. As cited by Humes (2006), two examples are provided of women veterans who used GI Bill benefits to become successful: Elizabeth Baker, who served in the Army during World War II used her G.I. Bill benefits to earn a masters and Ph.D. degree, then went on to design a new nursing program at Rutgers University. Another former Army servicewoman, Sarah Greenlee, used her G.I. Bill benefits to become a teacher and buy a home. The two stories described above uncover a different view of how the G.I. Bill did assist women to achieve a different role in society and the rumors that “painted” them to be something they were not.

The rumors of rampant sexual activities and lesbianism within the military were debunked by academic studies and memoirs of service women (Humes, 2006). Nonetheless, it was still apparent that women in the military were despised for penetrating a male-dominated institution. As cited by Humes (2006), the rumors did have a desired effect on the military's goal of recruiting a million women. As a result of the rumors, the military did not reach its recruiting numbers and those who were eligible to serve did not. In the end, if the military reached its recruiting numbers, then G.I. Bill benefits would have been available to more women.

The historical context and social forces of the time weighed heavily on female veterans. Although the glass ceiling was not broken, but perhaps somewhat cracked, the G.I. Bill did produce successful women. However, examples of overt gender discrimination abound. In general, after World War II, women were expected to return to their traditional social roles as mothers, housekeepers, child bearers, and dutiful wives. On the home front, "Rosie the Riveter," an American cultural icon used to describe women who worked in factory jobs to support the war effort, had vanished. Taken together, a generation that inspired all women to become independent and self-sufficient through hard work, somewhat succumbed to discriminatory practices. Humes (2006) looks beyond gender discrimination and writes that:

And yet, across generations, the G.I. Bill had a far more lasting impact on women in and out of the service. Just as the record of black soldiers during the war would help convince the military to abandon segregation in peacetime, so did the experience of WACs and WAVES and woman Marines eventually prod the

military into opening up new opportunities for women. Pay and benefits were equalized, putting the military ahead of the private sector. And though the number of women who went to college on the G.I. Bill was relatively small compared to men, 122,000 out of the 350,000 of those eligible, their children went to college in droves, boys and girls in equal measure. (Humes, 2006)

In the end, the G.I. Bill broke the elitism of the academy and opened doors to those who would never dream of attending college. Although discrimination occurred for women veterans, their children went on to level the playing field in higher education. Institutions were forever transformed into a true representation of a democratic society, but it took several generations of adversity to do so.

#### **Post 9/11 G.I. Bill and Education Benefits**

According to Griffin and Gilbert (2012), “the *Post 9/11 GI Bill* funded education and training for 55,000 veterans or their dependents in 2011 alone, investing more than \$7.7 billion in education benefits that fiscal year” (p. 2). The *Post 9/11 GI Bill* provides financial support for housing and education to eligible veterans with at least 90 days of aggregate service after September 10, 2001 or those with a service connected disability after 30 days of service. Only those honorably discharged from the military are entitled to services ([www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)). Among the many education benefits, veterans can take advantage of graduate and undergraduate degrees, vocational training/technical training, flight training, correspondence training, entrepreneurial training, tutorial assistance, and national and licensing programs ([www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)). All benefits must be approved by the Veterans Administration prior to enrolling in the above mentioned programs.

Specifically, full tuition and fees are paid to in-state institutions only. Veterans who want to enroll in private or foreign institutions may do so, however, tuition and fees are capped at \$17,500 per year. Additional benefits include a stipend of \$1,000 yearly stipend for books and supplies, a “Yellow Ribbon Program” for veterans who want to attend private institutions as non-resident out-of state students, a monthly housing allowance for those attending more than ½ time (based on rank of E-5 with dependents at location of school; those enrolled solely in distance learning courses the housing allowance will be paid at ½ the national average of basic allowance for housing for E-5 with dependents; for those attending foreign schools the current monthly housing allowance is fixed at \$1,368) and a one-time rural benefit payment for eligible individuals ([www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)).

### **Military Life and Training in the United States Armed Forces**

Although military life and training among several branches of the United States Armed Forces may differ, a general overview is provided here. As cited by Ensign (1990), common objectives of basic training are to teach recruits the chain of command. One reason for this indoctrination is to condition trainees to automatically obey orders from supervisors. Next, recruits are expected to develop a strong identification within the unit, while downplaying individual concerns. Lastly, recruits must develop physical fitness so that it inspires personal confidence (Ensign, 1990).

Preparation for military life, however, must begin prior to training. Physical fitness is a core component to ready service men and women for strenuous activities and situations. To prepare, recruits engage in a physical fitness program to pass the initial



strength tests to meet the military's standards for weight. This helps stimulate mental readiness for strict training standards. For those recruits who smoke, it is recommended to quit prior to training. According to Ensign (1990), none of the armed services allows recruits to smoke at any time during the entire training period. Additionally, during the training period, stress may exacerbate nicotine withdrawal and cause barriers to complete training, and, perhaps failure.

A typical day of basic training culminates in a 14 hour day beginning at 5:00 a.m. and ending at 9:00 p.m. As soon as recruits awake for the day, they are expected to shower, make their beds, organize living area, and march to breakfast. After breakfast, a variety of activities are completed throughout the day. Recruits exercise for 30-60 minutes, attend classroom instruction, clean weapons, and review study course materials. At 9:00 p.m., unless otherwise instructed, recruits must go to sleep and prepare for the same schedule the next day.

Life in the military is uniquely different than life as a civilian. Strict adherence to structure, rank, and years on military bases, often in self-contained areas, is a major difference of military life and the civilian world (Ensign, 1990). The military provides active military service men and women with a variety of services ranging from education for their children to other basic needs. Moving from one base to another is also common within the military. According to Ensign (1990), "a survey of Army families had moved at least once within the past three years and 23% reported moving three or more times during the same period" (p. 73).

## **Historical Background of Women in the United States Military**

**The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783).** The history of women in the United States military traces back to the days of the Revolutionary War. According to Willenz (1983), “many women, wives, widows, common-law wives-with their children followed the Continental Army and earned their rations in return for domestic skills that the army needed” (p. 10). They performed domestic duties including washing, cooking, and mending and often took rides in baggage wagons. At the time, it was reported that General Washington was frustrated with the “Women of the Army.”

Washington’s frustration affords an indirect glimpse of these hundreds of women who would not be separated from their husbands or from their ad hoc work in the camps, thus making it impossible to keep them off the wagons or from drawing their subsistence rations. Like it or not, Washington was stuck with what he had to refer to as the Women of the Army. (Willenz, 1983, p. 10)

Women also served as nurses during the Revolutionary War, but were regarded as “orderlies.” They cared for patients by providing direct care including feeding, cleaning, and administering medicine (Willenz, 1983). Surgery and other essential medical functions were left to the responsibility of men. Thus, a majority of women who served during the Revolutionary War were in support roles.

There are accounts of women who may have taken an active role in the militia units during the war. Willenz (1983) writes, “lists of citizens were drawn up of those between the ages of 15 and 50 who were capable of bearing arms, and these most often were women” (p. 11). Additionally, an account of the presence of women in militia units

points to oral testimony of the time: “A British raid into Connecticut was expected to encounter only rebellious women and formidable hosts of boys and girls” (Willenz, 1983, p. 11).

On the frontier, women were trained to assist in the defense of forts or stockades from attacks by Indians and were expected to defend their homes as well. They were also messengers and scouts for the early settlers (Willenz, 1983). One such scout, Ann Baily was nicknamed “Mad Ann Bailey” by American Indians in admiration for her daring and courage (Willenz, 1983).

**The American Civil War (1861-1865).** Seven thousand women served as nurses in the Union and Confederate armies. The North witnessed its first woman doctor, Elizabeth Blackwell, who organized the Women’s Central Relief Association, which trained battlefield nurses (Willenz, 1983). President Lincoln ensured that an organized healthcare system be implemented to deal with the wounded. Known as The Sanitary Commission, measures were taken to ensure that sanitary conditions existed when dealing with wounded soldiers (Willenz, 1983). The founder of the American Red Cross, Clara Barton, assisted the Union army by providing nursing services, supplies, and equipment (Willenz, 1983). She worked tirelessly to bring quality nursing care to the battlefields of the Civil War.

**World War I (1917-1918).** During this period, women served again as nurses, but in a capacity where combat conditions existed. As cited by Willenz (1983), approximately 22,000 Army nurses and 1,400 Navy nurses served in the United States and abroad. Those who went overseas to Europe encountered a combat-like environment

such as gas attacks, artillery bombardments, and deplorable conditions. Approximately 300 nurses died from diseases, others were wounded, and some were taken prisoners by the Germans and were incarcerated (Willenz, 1983).

For recognition of their accomplishments during the war, civilian women nurses pressed for granting of rank to military nurses. Opposition to award nurses rank as noncommissioned officers immediately ensued; however, the passage of the *Army Reorganization Act of 1920* authorized “relative rank” to nurses (Willenz, 1983). In 1947, Public Law 36 was passed by Congress which finally authorized commissioned officer rank within the Nurse Corps.

**World War II (1941-1945).** During WWII, approximately 59,000 women served in the Army Nurse Corps. They were assigned closer to the front lines on evacuation hospitals, hospital trains, hospital ships, and medical transport planes ([www.womenofwwii.com](http://www.womenofwwii.com)). Their impact in every theater of the war helped to keep the post-injury mortality low. “Overall, fewer than four percent of the American soldiers who received medical care in the field or underwent evacuation died from wounds or disease” ([www.womenofwwii.com](http://www.womenofwwii.com)).

Several women corps units were organized during WWII to assist with various operational duties. In 1943, Congress eliminated the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and replaced it with the Women’s Auxiliary Corps (WAC). The WACs primarily served in technical and professional functions including stock, foods, mechanics and trade, communications, radio, electrical, and clerical duties (Ensign,

1983). Approximately 40,000 women served overseas as “Air WACs” where they assisted the Army Air Force in aviation missions.

The WAVES or Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Services was authorized by Congress with the passage of Public Law 629. WAVES performed clerical, administrative, storekeeping, and medical duties. They were not permitted to go overseas, but served as control tower operators, link trainers, radar communications, and taught a variety of military classes (Ensign, 1983).

The Women’s Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs) tested and ferried planes from factories to air bases. These service women were specially trained at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas where some eventually became instructors and trainers themselves (Ensign, 1983). Ironically, the WASPs were never considered part of the military and fought for 30 years to obtain veteran status. Finally, in November 1977, President Jimmy Carter signed legislation granting WASPs veterans’ status ([www.womenofwwii.com](http://www.womenofwwii.com)).

On November 23, 1942, the Women’s Reserve of the Coast Guard (SPARS) was organized to fill the ranks of men who were sent abroad for active naval service. Women who served in the coast guard were former WAVES who agreed to be discharged from the Navy. However, the SPARS were restricted to the United States, not permitted to serve overseas, and women officers could not issue orders to male service members.

**The Korean War (1950-1953).** During the Korean War, many women served as nurses on transport ships, hospital trains, and Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (MASH). They were also stationed close to combat lines, being the only women to serve in a

theater of war ([www.army.mil/women/nurses.html](http://www.army.mil/women/nurses.html)). At this time, approximately 22,000 women served in the United States Armed Forces, 7,000 of which were nurses.

**The Vietnam War (1965-1972).** The major role of women during the Vietnam War was largely in the Nurse Corps. Six thousand nurses provided services to hospitals, dispensaries, and naval hospital ships. Some nurse units were in areas close to combat where the wounded were brought in by medics and helicopters. According to Ensign (1990), four women who served in these particular units received Purple Hearts for injuries sustained during a Viet Cong bombing of Saigon. Although wounded, these four women attended to others who were also injured.

The role of women in the military and their contribution to the nation was, and still is, an important element of American history. As nurses, pilots, medics, officers, supply clerks, and combat soldiers, women showed then, and today, that they are capable of military service. Although acceptance into the Armed Services was mixed, the ability of women to serve with their male counterparts was a major accomplishment. However, as they return home from military service, adjustment and transition to civilian life is also a challenge.

**The Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), Iraq (2003-2011), and Afghanistan (2003-Present).** Following the end of the Vietnam War and with it, the draft, servicewomen were recruited heavily to fill the ranks of diminishing enlistments. Opportunities for women became available during this time period, but they were still excluded from combat units, serving on ships of war, and operating combat aircraft (Wise & Baron, 2006). As the Pentagon soon relaxed the various classifications of “combat,” women

were allowed to serve on military ships and participated in air combat operations during a three day bombing campaign in Iraq (Operation Desert Fox-1998). Although 90% of career opportunities were available to women following The Persian Gulf war, women were technically still excluded from ground combat units (Wise & Baron, 2006). However, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with no clear combat boundaries, placed servicewomen directly on the front lines and in harm's way.

### **Veteran Transition Experiences**

Rumann (2010) explored the transition experiences of veterans in two community colleges based in the Midwest. A phenomenological approach was used to uncover certain themes during interviews with six participants aged 22-28 years. The research sample included six participants, one female and six males, enrolled in one of the two community college settings. Each participant shared their unique experiences as soldiers, such as reasons for enlisting, and transition events from military to civilian life.

Based on Schlossberg's (1989) Transition Theory, the researcher noted that "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" is one of many approaches to understand how veterans transition through each phase from military service, to civilian life, and into the community college environment. As cited by Rumann (2010), the link between each transition phase depends on a variety of factors, including how particular individuals deal with change. Noted is that four themes emerged during the interview process which includes, "participants' shared experiences and meaning making process, participants' relationships as civilian and service members, and then more specifically as college students" (Rumann, 2010, p. 87). As the transition experience progressed,

participants' gradually re-acclimated to the civilian world, but not without some challenges.

Thurnball (2010) conducted a study of 12 participants using a didactic interview approach to explore two main research questions. Of particular interest, was the decision of veterans to enroll in college after military service and their transition experiences as they entered a new social role as college students. Furthermore, different transition experiences between those who served in combat versus those who did not, were also a focus of the study.

Cited by Thurnball (2010) "Though the transitions of combat veterans versus supporting role veterans is slightly different both still need to change their way of thinking from the military to fit into the college community" (p. 32). Not quite clear in this statement is how a veteran can change his/her way of thinking in response to a transition to adapt in a new environment, in this case, a role change from veteran to student. Equally, because the military and higher education institutions differ in many ways, the transition may bring a transformative learning experience. To "change a way one thinks" is complex and could take some time. However, the transition and transformative learning experience may contribute to a change of thinking.

Thurnball (2010) relied on grounded theory, which attempts to uncover lived experiences and provide an authentic story of such experiences. The researcher further explains that Ebaugh's Role Exiting theory was used as an analysis tool to bring out several themes. Specifically, themes include family support as a factor in a veteran's



decision to attend college, educational credentials to obtain a job after graduation, and general emotional support to begin the college admissions process.

Dahan (2008) investigated the transition experiences of undergraduate student veterans in a four year institution. Based on Schlossberg's mattering scale and Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, the research addressed five focus areas: administration, advising, faculty, multiple roles, and peers. Findings suggested that in most of the five areas, participants' were satisfied; however, a closer look reveals one important area of concern. Interactions with faculty and students who did not serve in the military can sometimes be uncomfortable for student veterans. Faculty may not be sensitive to and understand the veteran experience; students who did not serve may express negative views about the military; and America's role in Iraq and Afghanistan may not be popular among the general student population.

According to Dahan (2008), "A total of 21.5% agreed or strongly agreed that their questions put faculty members on the defensive, and an even a greater number of 29.4% of veteran students surveyed felt that professors interpreted their assertiveness as a challenge to their authority" (p. 49). To further support this finding, as cited by Diramio and Jarvis (2011), Holmstead (2009) provides a narrative of a female veteran who had served from Iraq and was now enrolled in a college course. The female veteran did not want to share her military experience with others, but with only those served in combat (Diramio & Jarvis, 2011). As she sat in her philosophy class and listened to other students speak about the war, she attempted to share her thoughts. However, she felt as no one wanted to hear what she had to say (Diramio & Jarvis, 2011).

At one point, hearing something that went directly against her beliefs and personal knowledge, she could not let it go and she erupted, lashing out like her sergeant self-dressing down a private. Holmstedt (2009) further writes that this classroom experience left the female veteran feeling as if her experiences in combat were being invalidated by the students and the instructor. (Diramio & Jarvis, 2011)

Dahan (2008) took a step further to understand the transformative learning experiences of student veterans. The research showed that a student veteran who was not involved in campus life did not experience a transformative learning experience whereas those who were involved did experience a transformative learning experience. Although this finding is somewhat vague, the researcher writes, “In this instance, the students who enjoyed the campus atmosphere were involved in a fraternity, in their major, or enjoyed the resources offered by the university. The student who did not enjoy the campus atmosphere, according to Mezirow, had not formed her new frame of reference, which could not transform her points of view leading her to new habits of mind” (Dahan, 2008, p. 52). The connection of “habits of mind” to a transformative learning experience, in this case, feeling a sense of belonging on campus is not discernible.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Schlossberg’s Transition Theory.** Schlossberg’s Transition Theory centers on individual experiences to explain life changes. Life changes equate to transition periods or anticipated transitions (predicted) and unanticipated transitions (not predicted). For example, adult transitions may include marriage, divorce, retirement, new job, returning

to school, or death of a spouse. Furthermore, Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) discussed that as adult learners return to the education environment; they experience a transition process that consists of three stages. The three stages are moving in (going to away to college), moving through (getting good grades; staying disciplined; finding meaning), and moving on (graduating and starting a career).

A transition is like a trip. Preparation for the trip, the actual trip, and its aftermath all elicit feelings and reactions. But feelings at the start of a trip differ from reactions to it later. In the same way, reactions to a transition continue to change as the transition is integrated into one's life. (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 15)

The transition framework also includes the "4 Ss," which resembles more of a counseling model in its application to life experiences. First, situations continuously arise that may cause or present many challenges. Eight questions are explored to fully understand an individual's situation or perhaps a recurring one. Second, "self" includes personal and demographic (my poor health affects my way of life) and psychological resources (what can I do to cope?). Next, support includes family and friends who can offer encouragement and institutions that specialize in professional counseling services. Finally, strategies refer to "coping responses" or implementing a plan to deal with a transition or crisis.

The "4 Ss" and three transition phases provides one framework for student affairs professionals when helping someone, in this case, female veterans deal with change. Relationship building instills trust through "sound listening skills" and helps one to better understand the transition. Second, an assessment is done to address current strategies,

support systems, and the overall situation. Third, individuals set “goals” to fully deal with the transition. Fourth, “intervention” techniques help to possibly change the perception of the situation. Finally, a “review” of the transition is conducted and planning is used to move beyond the problem.

Although Schlossberg’s Transition Theory has been heavily criticized for its individual counseling approach to explain transitional phases it nevertheless is a guide for higher education practitioners to support adult learners in various transition phases. Sisco (1998) writes, “a key element in effectively serving adults is to view them as individuals in transition-people who want to make the most of their education and personal experiences so that they may realize their goals and aspirations” (p. 20). A majority of veterans returning to college are adult learners or what higher education calls “non-traditional” students. They are older, may have additional responsibilities outside of school (family, job, or some other commitment), typically remain on campus for a short period of time (limited social interaction with others), and are in a critical time of transition (a structured military life to an unstructured civilian life).

The role change from soldier to student is a transitional experience in it of itself- the ability to adapt to a new environment. In this case, an educational environment that is different from the typical structured military life. Although the student has a planned academic schedule and various course assignments, the struggle to adjust may be a daunting task. Sisco (1998) points out, “it is not unusual for two people to have contrasting perspectives about the prospects of returning to school at the beginning of a transition-such as excitement for one and fear for the other-and within a short period of

time, the initial excitement of the first person is replaced by fear and the initial fear of the second person is replaced by excitement” (p. 23). In short, institutions of higher education have an opportunity to enhance the transition process by providing support for women student veterans.

**Schlossberg: The Need to Matter.** The “need to matter” is around us in our daily lives. People need to feel a sense that they belong; that they matter to others; that a care orientation exists to fulfill their needs; and that they depend on others and vice versa. According to Schlossberg et al. (1989), “mattering refers to the beliefs that people have whether right or wrong, that they matter to someone else, that they are the object of someone else’s attention, and that others care about them” (p. 21). The original term is attributed to Morris Rosenberg, a sociologist, defined as “a motive: the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension” (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

In the context of higher education, adult learners must have a sense that their college or university makes them feel that they matter and are treated like human beings. Adult learners need to feel appreciated and noticed during the three transition periods as they move in, move through, and move on (Schlossberg et al., 1989). The old adage, “I want to feel like a person and not a number” certainly makes sense in an institution of higher education, whether large or small.

A faculty member was forced to cancel a class lecture because of the flu. The class was large, with students from many departments and neighboring institutions. The faculty person, with the help of a secretary called every student

in the class. The following week, students remarked that never in their experience as students had a faculty member had the consideration to call them; in fact, they had never received a phone call from either a faculty member or an administrator. They were amazed, touched, and grateful. This anecdote saddened us. Why should consideration of students be so startling? (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 21)

The short narrative described above relates to an overall feeling of mattering on a college campus. In this account, however, students were generally surprised by the faculty member's behavior. Schlossberg and Warren (1985) conducted a study on adult learners who participated in a nontraditional educational options designed by the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning. The researchers found that the adult learners who were involved in the study felt as though they mattered to an advisor and the institution (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Not only did adult learners feel as though they mattered, in the end, the study concluded they were more engaged in the classroom.

Mattering, then, became a core component of Schlossberg, Lassalle, and Golec's (1990) *Mattering Scales for Adults in Postsecondary Education (MHE)*. The central question was: Are the policies, practices and classroom activities geared to making people feel they matter? According to Dahan (2008), Schlossberg et al. (1990), identified five focus areas or subscales of the *MHE*: administration, advising, faculty, multiple roles, and peers. The Administration subscale measures students' perceptions of mattering in the area of policies and procedures of the college or university. Such policies may include convenient course times, ease of registering for courses, and faculty office hours and various student support services. Environments where high scores are achieved

indicate that campus policies are accommodating in terms of timing of class offerings, payment of fees, and registration scheduling (Lucas 2009; Schlossberg et al., 1990). The Advising Subscale measures how well university advisors respond to student questions, problems, and address issues. A high score in this area would indicate that students perceive advisors as attentive to their needs, available at convenient times or a combination of both (Lucas, 2009).

The Faculty Subscale measures students' perceptions of mattering as a function of the extent to which faculty members accept and include the adult student in the classroom (Lucas, 2009; Schlossberg et al., 1990). A high score in this area may indicate that adult students are recognized in the classroom and for their life experiences (Lucas, 2009).

The Multiple Roles Subscale measures students' perceptions of mattering in regards to how the campus administration recognizes their additional responsibilities. For example, adult learners have part-time or full-time jobs, commute to school by car or public transportation, have families to take care of, and other demands of life that may impact course work. A high score in this area would indicate that students are satisfied with access to administrative offices that respects their time on campus.

The Peers subscale measures the student's perceptions of the extent to which they feel they belong on campus and are accepted as peers in the classroom (Lucas, 2009; Schlossberg et al., 1990).

Environments where high scores are achieved indicate that adult students feel comfortable in the classroom and they feel they belong in the classroom. Adult students who score this area high feel like their experiences and contributions are

valued and that they overcome any perceptions of weaknesses on the part of their traditionally aged classmates. (Lucas, 2009, p. 23)

Morris Rosenberg, a sociologist, identified the five dimensions of mattering; however, Schlossberg and others took a step further to conceptualize the five dimensions. As cited by Schlossberg et al. (1989), the five dimensions include: attention, importance, dependence, ego-extension, and appreciation. Attention is the need to feel noticed by others; importance is the feeling that others' care about how one thinks, feels, and acts; dependence is a unique aspect of mattering-the focus is on a person(s) depending on another; ego extension is being proud of someone's accomplishments and disappointed in their failures; and appreciation is a feeling that others are thankful for what we are and what we do (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

**Mezirow and Associates: Transformative Learning Theory.** Mezirow and Associates (1990) explain that “to make meaning means to make sense of an experience; we make an interpretation of it” (p. 1). The key here is that interpretation of an experience guides our actions and decisions. Thus, learning occurs during a process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience or structuring meaning (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). There are two aspects of structuring meaning-schemes and perspectives. According to Mezirow and Associates (1990), meaning schemes are “sets of related and habitual expectations governing if-then, cause-effect and category relationships as well as event sequences” (p. 2). So, we expect some sort of certainty in our lives. We expect that flying from New Jersey to California instead of driving will get us to there in less amount of time; water to quench our thirst; and having



shelter will keep us safe from the elements. The expectations become routine and developed into a set of rules for making meaning in our lives.

Another aspect of making meaning is referred to as “meaning perspectives.” Meaning perspectives refer to the structure of assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one’s past experience during the process of interpretation (Mezirow & Associates 1990). Thus, individuals interpret experience in their own unique way, develop belief systems, acquire, use, and understand knowledge, and learn how to handle emotions. According to Mezirow and Associates (1990), the most familiar examples of meaning perspective and of transformative learning come from the women’s movement:

Within a very few years, hundreds of thousands of women whose personal identity, self-concept, and values had been derived principally from prescribed social norms and from acting out sex-stereotypical roles came to challenge these assumptions and to redefine their lives in their own terms. The women’s movement provided a support climate for this kind of personal reappraisal by publicizing the constraints on personal development, autonomy, and self-determination imposed by such stereotypes and by providing support groups and role models. (Mezirow & Associates, 1990, p. 3)

What took hold in the women’s movement was a learning experience that sought to alter social norms and roles, and change not only how women viewed themselves, but how society viewed them. The traditional sex-type role of being a housewife or the old adage, “to be seen, but not heard” was questioned. Thus, perspective transformation took

hold here—a response to an externally imposed disorienting dilemma (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). The disorienting dilemma, however, can be triggered by a number of learning experiences to include reading a book, listening to a lecture, taking a class, or conducting research. The key is that learning something new may bring about a perspective transformation experience—one which challenges previous experiences and contributes to a more accepting view of the world.

**Cranton: Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory.** Cranton (2006) explained Mezirow’s transformative learning theory in, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*. As a guide for educators, Cranton (2006) attempts to apply transformative learning to the adult learner and in the case of this study, women veterans certainly fit well into an adult learning model. In terms of experience in the military, a transformative learning experience may take place gradually or immediately. As one becomes indoctrinated into a different life in the military as opposed to civilian life, then experiences of the past may come into question. So, as Cranton (2010) writes, “transformative learning has to do with making meaning out of experiences and questioning assumptions based on prior experience” (p. 8). In addition, as one questions past experiences, a transformation may occur along with reflective judgment.

As mentioned earlier, making meaning comes from meaning perspectives or habits of mind. Mezirow (2000) explains that six habits of mind exist: epistemic (related to knowledge and the way we acquire knowledge); sociolinguistic (based on social norms, cultural expectations, and the way we use language); psychological (self-concept, needs, inhibition, anxieties, and fears); moral ethical (incorporate conscience and

morality); philosophical (based on transcendental worldview, philosophy, or religious doctrine); and aesthetic (our values, attitudes, tastes, judgments, and standards about beauty). Habits of mind are the way in which one experiences the world based on background, culture, experience, and personality.

An important piece of transformative learning is reflection. Mezirow writes that “These adult capabilities are indispensable for fully understanding the meaning of our experience and effective rational adult reasoning in critical discourse and communicative learning” (as cited in Cranton, 2006, p. 32). Cranton (2006), however, takes a step further by including three types of reflection: content, process, and premise. First, content reflection includes solving a particular problem which leads to instrumental knowledge or a particular feeling of being out of place and reactions to it (emancipatory learning). Second, process reflection occurs when one attempts to question problem solving strategies or reflecting on one’s self-perception when returning to school (Cranton, 2006). Finally, premise reflection occurs when a problem is finally questioned. According to Cranton (2006), premise reflection may lead people to a transformation of a habit of mind. Thus, in premise reflection, the learner reinterprets ways in which they view the world while content and process reflection may change their beliefs.

Viewed from an adult learning perspective, transformative learning may unlock several clues to understand women veterans’ views about themselves and the world. An education along with lived experiences while in the military may explain their authentic selves. Higher education institutions may also benefit from women veterans’ experiences.

## **Summary of the Literature Review**

Institutions of higher education will see an increase of women veterans returning to campus. To address the influx of women veterans, a strong support system must exist for them to succeed. For women veterans, their challenges, experiences, and needs are unique both in the military and the civilian world. Foster (2010) cites that women veterans need to be recognized, respected, and supported in the area of not only education but in social and mental health issues as well. There is limited information about women veterans, making it difficult to conceptualize and understand their experiences and unique needs.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory may help to explain the lived experiences of female veterans. While one "moves in, moves through, and moves on" into a particular role and a new environment, a role change may occur. According to Diramio and Jarvis (2011), "most transitions involve a changing of roles, which could include role loss or role gain commensurate with attending college" (p. 12). Thus, as women veterans transition into their new roles, institutions of higher education must be ready to help ease the successful transition from the military to college with an appropriate support structure.

The need to matter points to five focus areas within the institution: administration, advising, faculty, multiple roles, and peers. Each of these five areas is important in that non-traditional students must feel a sense that they are connected to the institution and that their needs are being met. Women veterans are typically non-traditional students as most join the military upon graduation from high school and return later to use their G.I.

Bill education benefits. Additionally, they may be employed full time or part time, married, raising children, or have other responsibilities outside of the college classroom.

The military, an educational experience in it of itself, may provide a solid foundation and opportunity for transformative learning experiences. Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning could offer a deeper understanding of women veterans in the area of personal growth, changed perspective, a worldly education, or a number of other experiences. The theory was developed from a study of 83 women returning to college in 12 reentry programs (Cranton, 2006). Mezirow identified a 10 phase process which he termed perspective transformation from the results of his research on women returning to college (cited in Cranton, 2006, p. 20) As one moves through the 10 phases, the end result is that a person may encounter a changed perspective based on a new learning experience or in laymen's terms, an "a-ha moment" whereby the learner becomes uniquely different than his/her previous self:

1. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma
2. Undergoing self-examination
3. Conducting a critical assessment of internalized assumptions and feeling a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations
4. Relating discontent to the similar experiences of others-recognizing the problem is shared
5. Exploring options for new ways of learning
6. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles
7. Planning a course of action

8. Acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing a new course of action
9. Trying out new roles and assessing them
10. Reintegrating into society with the new perspective. (Cranton, 2006, p. 20)

Dahan's (2008) study on male and female veterans provides a glimpse into the transition and transformative learning experiences of men and women veterans.

Furthermore, the five focus areas: administration, advising, faculty, multiple roles, and peers were used to gauge students' overall perceptions of mattering on campus. Results showed that participants were generally satisfied with their college experience. Although transformative learning experiences may have occurred during military service and beyond, those experiences are different for each veteran depending on context and timing. Dahan (2008) concluded that participants did not experience a transformative learning experience due to feeling disconnected from peers and the general campus community. Additional research is needed in this area to confirm the findings of this study.

The studies presented here attempt to explore transition experiences, transformative learning experiences, and a sense of mattering as veterans return to higher education institutions. A majority of the studies used a qualitative approach to uncover various themes and authentic stories of research participants. Overall, the general student veteran population was sampled which does not provide a complete understanding of women veterans' attitudes of mattering on campus, and transitions and transformative learning experiences. Although male and female veterans were indoctrinated as soldiers

through basic training, their experiences are starkly different. Research on women veterans alone is limited and this study sought to fill that gap.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Context of the Study**

The study was conducted at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey (RSC) situated in the Pinelands region of the state in Atlantic County. Current enrollment totals 8,400 full-time and part-time undergraduate and graduate students. Of that number, approximately 350 are student veterans, 30 of which are women veterans. The student veteran graduation rate is 94%; grade point average (GPA) of a graduating veteran student is 3.41; and retention rate of student veterans for years 2009 to 2011 was 99.8%.

The institution is designated as a “Military Friendly School” by *G.I. Jobs Magazine* and adheres to the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) framework for on-campus programming, and recognized as a “Veteran Friendly” Institution by the American Council on Education (ACE). As a result of these distinctions, the college prides itself on the highest service delivery to all veterans. Additionally, the Office of Veteran Affairs implemented seven guiding principles to further support its efforts to enhance programming for its student veteran population.

Current college partnerships include the Yellow Ribbon Program; Operation College Promise (OCP); Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC); Pat Tillman Foundation; Employment Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR); Concurrent Admissions Program (ConAP); “Got Your Six;” Absecon Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW); and New Jersey Department of Veteran Affairs.



The Office of Veteran Affairs provides a variety of services and activities with the assistance of the Student Veterans Organization (SVO). A new student veteran orientation was recently implemented to introduce veterans to the campus, provide panel discussions, complete registration for courses, and connect veterans to various community organizations. An opportunity to meet with faculty mentors, who are also veterans, is included to provide a connection with those who served or are currently serving in the military.

### **Population and Sample Selection**

Target population for this study was all women student veterans seeking a degree and enrolled full-time or part-time in for-credit courses during spring 2013 semester at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. A woman student veteran is defined as a student who served or is currently serving in the United States Armed Forces. The available population was all women student veterans enrolled at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey during the spring 2013 semester. A random sample was used to reach the available population. A total of 30 women student veterans were enrolled at Richard Stockton College at the time of this study. A mixed-methods research design employing a quantitative and qualitative approach was aimed at collecting 20-30 surveys and four to six interviews.

### **Instrumentation**

Based on Dahan's (2008) study, *The Veteran Student Survey on Transition into College* was used to collect data on women student veterans' transformative learning and transition experiences at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey during the spring

2013 semester (Appendix A). The survey included specific directions on how to complete the survey and consisted of 45 items; 19 of which were based on Schlossberg's *Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Postsecondary Education (MHE)* (Dahan, 2008). Participants were asked to rate each response using a five-point Likert-type scale from 1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral; 4=agree; or 5=strongly agree. Demographic information was obtained and included full-time, part-time, branch of service, military rank, G.I. Bill education benefits chapter, major, and age (Appendix B).

According to Schlossberg et al. (1990), the *MHE* is reliable and valid. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients for reliability for the five subscales were:  $\alpha = .850$  for administration,  $\alpha = .820$  for advising,  $\alpha = .860$  for peers,  $\alpha = .770$  for multiple roles, and  $\alpha = .842$  for faculty. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was employed to test the internal reliability for the five subscales of the modified *MHE*. The results for the five subscales were:  $\alpha = .403$  for administration,  $\alpha = .541$  for advising,  $\alpha = .447$  for peers,  $\alpha = .718$  for multiple roles, and  $\alpha = .458$  for faculty. The findings here suggest that due to the small sample size ( $N=9$ ), reliability data would likely contribute to differing scores. Of equal importance is the *MHE* may not be the most reliable instrument because veterans report having different experiences while in the military.

Dahan's (2008) *Interview Questions for Veteran Students* was used during a formal interview with women veterans enrolled full-time or part-time during the spring 2013 semester (Appendix C). The interview instrument consisted of 11 questions, nine of which were designed to ask the interviewee about their feelings towards returning to college, their past military service, their feelings towards the campus and the services

made available, how their time on campus is divided and what recommendations they may have to improve the campus to the needs of all undergraduate students (Dahan, 2008). The final question was designed to probe for further information and provided an opportunity for the interviewee to ask the primary investigator question(s).

For the purpose of this study, the interview instrument was used solely for all women student veterans enrolled full time or part time during the spring 2013 semester at Richard Stockton College. Furthermore, an attempt to uncover transformative learning experiences and various themes were explored during the interview. According to Dahan (2008) validity and reliability was determined by having an advisor and an administrator review the interview questions to make sure they were easy to understand.

### **Procedures of Gathering Data**

The Institutional Review Board of Rowan University granted me permission to conduct the study (See Appendix D). Permission to conduct the study was also obtained by Tom O'Donnell, Assistant Dean of Students, Richard Stockton College of New Jersey (See Appendix E). The qualitative approach to the study included interviews to understand various themes and transformative learning and transition experiences. All interviews took place at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey in the Office of Veteran Affairs conference room. Participants were provided with the *Interview Questions for Veteran Students* in order to follow-along during the interview and audio taped with informed consent during the spring 2013 semester (See Appendix F). If, at any time, a participant felt uncomfortable to proceed with the interview, then they were given the option to withdraw without penalty. Participants were informed that anonymity was

strictly applied to protect their identity with the use of pseudonyms and that all interviews were strictly confidential. A debriefing form and campus counseling resources information packet was provided to interviewees in the event emotional triggers were elicited (See Appendix G).

A survey was used for the quantitative area of the study to reach a larger population of women student veterans to understand the five focus areas of mattering at Richard Stockton College. Participants were asked if they would volunteer for a study on women veterans in higher education. A consent form was included to obtain permission from volunteers to participate in the study; personal identity would not be disclosed; responses kept confidential; the option to withdraw at any time and without penalty; and directions to complete the survey. A \$5.00 gift card was provided as an incentive for participants who completed the survey and to those who started the survey, but withdrew voluntarily.

Several strategies were implemented using a random sample approach to reach the available women student veteran population enrolled at Richard Stockton College. First, women student veterans who visited the Office of Veteran Affairs were asked to participate in the study. Eight surveys and six interviews were completed using this approach. Second, two mass emails were sent to all 30 women student veterans and of that number, only one survey was returned. Third, I attended a Student Veteran Organization (SVO) meeting to request volunteers for the study. A zero response rate was the result of this approach. Finally, 10 participants were randomly selected from an internal college database enrollment list and contacted via telephone. Messages were left

for potential participants to contact the primary investigator or the designated staff member at the Office of Veteran Affairs, regarding a research study on women veterans in higher education. Phone messages were not returned, yielding a zero response rate.

### **Data Analysis**

Research question one addressed the quantitative data of this study. The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze survey results from The Veteran Transition Survey (Dahan, 2008; Schlossberg et al., 1990). Variations in women student veterans' attitudes were also analyzed in relation to Schlossberg's (1989) five focus areas of mattering by means of descriptive statistics (Dahan, 2008). A table was generated to include mean scores ranked highest to lowest, frequency of participant responses, percentage of participant responses, and standard deviation scores.

Research questions two, three, and four addressed the qualitative approach of this study. Content analysis was used to interpret qualitative data based on *Rules and Procedures for Logical Analysis of Written Data* (Sisco, 1981; Appendix H). All taped interviews were played back, numbered, and organized into typed transcripts. Main themes were then identified and coded by category; subcategory, frequency, and rank (see Chapter IV). A total of 11 questions comprised the interview schedule.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

#### **Quantitative Profile of the Sample**

Subjects in this study were all women student veterans enrolled full-time or part-time in for-credit courses at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey during the spring 2013 semester. A total of 30 women student veterans were identified via an internal college database and randomly selected using three approaches: (a) those who visited the Office of Veteran Affairs were asked if they were interested to participate in a research study; (b) randomly selected from the college database list and contacted via phone; and (c) a mass email was sent that included the survey instrument and if interested, an opportunity to participate in an interview.

Nine surveys were completed during March and April 2013. Demographic information was captured on those who participated in the survey (Table 4.1). Four participants were between the ages of 21-23 years (44.4%); one was between 24-26 years of age (11.1%); and four were other ages (44.4%). Eight were enrolled full-time (88.9%) and one was enrolled part-time (11.1%). Six college majors were identified. Two participants reported Criminal Justice (22.2%), one reported Biology (11.1%); one was Undeclared (11.1%); two reported Social Work (22.2%); one reported Speech Pathology (11.1%); one reported Occupational Therapy (11.1%); and one reported Holocaust Studies (11.1%). Two branches of service were also identified via the survey. Four participants reported serving in the Air Force (44.4%) and five served in the Army

(55.6%). Six ranks were identified. Two Private First Class (22.2%); one Corporal (11.1%); two Sergeants (22.2%); one Airman First Class (11.1%); two Senior Airman (22.2%); and one Captain (11.1%). Years of service varied among participants ranging from one to seven years of service. One at one year (11.1%); one at two years (11.1%); one at three years (11.1%); one at five years (11.1%); four at six years (44.4%) and one at seven years (11.1%). G.I. Bill education chapter included four enrolled in 1606 (44.4%); two enrolled in chapter 30 (22.2%); two enrolled in chapter 33 (22.2%); and one indicated other (11.1%).

Table 4.1  
*Demographic Information (N=9)*

	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Age:</i>		
21-23	4	44.4
24-26	1	11.1
Other	4	44.4
<i>Classification:</i>		
Full Time	8	88.9
Part Time	1	11.1
<i>Academic Major:</i>		
Criminal Justice	2	22.2
Biology	1	11.1
Undeclared	1	11.1
Social Work	2	22.2
Speech Pathology	1	11.1
Occupational Therapy	1	11.1
Holocaust Studies	1	11.1
<i>Branch of Service:</i>		
Air Force	4	44.4
Army	5	55.6
<i>Rank:</i>		
Private First Class	2	22.2
Corporal	1	11.1
Sergeant	2	22.2

Airman First Class	1	11.1
Senior Airman	2	22.2
Captain	1	11.1
<i>Years of Service:</i>		
One	1	11.1
Two	1	11.1
Three	1	11.1
Five	1	11.1
Six	4	44.4
Seven	1	11.1
<i>GI Bill Education Chapter:</i>		
1606	4	44.4
30	2	22.2
33	2	22.2
Other	1	11.1

### **Quantitative Analysis of the Data**

Research Question 1: What do selected Richard Stockton College women student veterans report regarding the five focus areas of mattering on the college campus?

Table 4.2 contains the results of 11 survey items based on Schlossberg’s First Focus Area on Administration. The Likert-type survey items are arranged from strongly agree=5; agree=4; neutral=3; disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1. Mean scores are arranged from highest to lowest. A mean score of 3.0 and above indicates a level of agreement in response to a survey item and a mean score below 3.0 indicates a level of disagreement in response to a survey item.

The highest ranked item, “Administrative staff is helpful in answering my questions,” had a mean score of 4.00 and standard deviation of 0.866. Two participants strongly agreed with this statement (22.2%); six participants agreed (66.7%) and one participant disagreed (11.1%).



The second item, “The administration sets things up to be easy for them, not the students,” had a mean score of 3.78 and standard deviation of 1.202. Three participants strongly agreed with this statement (33.3%); three participants agreed with this statement (33.3%); one participant indicated neutral (11.1%); and two disagreed with this statement (22.2%).

The third item, “The administration seems to consider student priorities as important,” had a mean score of 3.67 and standard deviation of 1.323. Two participants (22.2%) strongly agreed with this statement; five participants agreed (55.6%); one participant disagreed (11.1%); and one participant strongly disagreed (11.1%).

The sixth item, “The administrative offices are not open at times that I need them,” had a mean score of 3.22 and standard deviation of 1.302. One participant strongly agreed with this statement (11.1%); four agreed (44.4%); one indicated neutral (11.1%); two disagreed (22.2%) and one strongly disagreed (11.1%).

The seventh item, “The administrative rules and regulations are clear to me,” had a mean score of 2.78 and standard deviation of 1.093. One participant strongly agreed with this statement (11.1%); one agreed (11.1%); two indicated neutral (22.2%) and five disagreed (55.6%).

The final item, “I don’t have time to complete the administrative tasks the institution requires,” had a mean score of 2.44 and standard deviation of 1.236. One participant strongly agreed with this statement (11.1%); one agreed (11.1%); six disagreed (66.7%) and one strongly disagreed (11.1%).

Table 4.2

*Survey Items Pertaining to Schlossberg's First Focus Area on Administration*

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
	Administrative staff is helpful in answering my questions <i>N=9, M=4.00, SD=.866</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	6	66.70%	0	0.00%	1	11.10%	0
The administration sets things up to be easy for them, not the students <i>N=9, M=3.78, SD=1.202</i> Missing=0	3	33.30%	3	33.30%	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	0	0.00%
The administration seems to consider student priorities as important <i>N=9, M=3.67, SD=1.323</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	5	55.60%	0	0.00%	1	11.10%	1	11.10%
The administration makes efforts to accommodate students <i>N=9, M=3.44, SD=1.333</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	3	33.30%	2	22.20%	1	11.10%	1	11.10%
The university does not commit enough resources to off-campus courses <i>N=9, M=3.33, SD=1.000</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	3	33.30%	3	33.30%	2	22.20%	0	0.00%
The administrative offices are not open at times I need them <i>N=9, M=3.22, SD=1.302</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	4	44.40%	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	1	11.10%
The administrative rules and regulations are clear to me <i>N=9, M=2.78, SD=1.093</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	5	55.60%	0	0.00%

I don't have time to complete the administrative tasks the institution requires	1	11.10%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	6	66.70%	1	11.10%
<i>N=9, M=2.44, SD=1.236</i>										
Missing=0										

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Table 4.3 contains the results of four survey items based on Schlossberg's Second Focus Area on Advising. The Likert-type survey items are arranged from strongly agree=5; agree=4; neutral=3; disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1. Mean scores are arranged from highest to lowest. For the purpose of this study, a mean score of 3.0 and above indicates a level of agreement in response to a survey item and a mean score below 3.0 indicates a level of disagreement in response to a survey item.

The highest ranked item, "If my advisor does not know the answers to my questions, he or she will seek out the answers," had a mean score of 3.67 and standard deviation of 1.118. One participant (11.1%) strongly agreed with this statement; six agreed (66.6%); one indicated neutral (11.1%); and one strongly disagreed (11.1%).

The second item, "There has always been an advisor available to talk if I have a question," had a mean score of 3.56 and standard deviation of 1.014. One participant (11.1%) strongly agreed with this statement; five agreed with this statement (55.6%); one indicated neutral (11.1%); and two disagreed (22.2%).

The third item, "My advisor has office hours at times I am on campus," had a mean score of 3.00 and standard deviation of 1.500. Two participants (22.2%) strongly agreed with this statement; two agreed (22.2%); four disagreed (44.4%); and one strongly disagreed (11.1%).

The final item, "My advisor doesn't seem to remember things we have discussed before," had a mean score of 2.67 and a standard deviation of 1.00. One participant

(11.1%) strongly agreed with this statement; three indicated neutral (33.3%); and five disagreed (55.6%).

Table 4.3

*Survey Items Pertaining to Schlossberg's Second Focus Area on Advising*

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
	If my advisor does not know the answers to my questions, he or she will seek out the answers <i>N=9, M=3.67, SD=1.118</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	6	66.70%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	1
There has always been an advisor available to talk if I have a question <i>N=9, M=3.56, SD=1.014</i> Missing=0	1	1.10%	5	55.60%	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	0	0.00%
My advisor has office hours at times I am on campus <i>N=9, M=3.00, SD=1.500</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	2	22.20%	0	0.00%	4	44.40%	1	11.10%
My advisor doesn't seem to remember things we have discussed before <i>N=9, M=2.67, SD=1.000</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	3	33.30%	5	55.60%	0	0.00%

Table 4.4 contains the results of 10 survey items based on Schlossberg's Third Focus Area on Faculty. The Likert-type survey items are arranged from strongly agree=5; agree=4; neutral=3; disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1. Mean scores are arranged from highest to lowest. For the purpose of this study, a mean score of 3.0 and above indicates a level of agreement in response to a survey item and a mean score below 3.0 indicates a level of disagreement in response to a survey item.

The first item, “My experience-based comments are accepted by my professors,” had a mean score of 4.11 and standard deviation of .928. Three participants (33.3%) strongly agreed with this statement; five agreed (55.6%); and one disagreed (11.1%). The second item, “The classroom atmosphere encourages me to speak out in class,” had a mean score of 3.56 and a standard deviation of 1.509. Three participants (33.3%) strongly agreed with this statement; three agreed (33.3%); two disagreed (22.2%); and one strongly disagreed (11.1%). The third item, “Classes are offered at times that are good for me,” had a mean score of 3.44 and standard deviation of 1.236. One participant strongly agreed with this statement (11.1%); five agreed with this statement (55.6%); one indicated neutral (11.1%); and one disagreed (11.1%). The eighth item, “I sometimes feel my professors want me to hurry up and finish speaking,” had a mean score of 2.44 and a standard deviation of 1.424. One participant strongly agreed with this statement (11.1%); one agreed (11.1%); two indicated neutral (22.2%); two disagreed (22.2%); and three strongly disagreed (33.3%). The ninth item, “My professors seem to recognize other students but not me,” had a mean score of 2.33 and standard deviation of 1.225. One participant strongly agreed with this statement (11.1%); two indicated neutral (22.2%); four disagreed (44.4%); and two strongly disagreed. The final item, “Some of the jokes my professors tell make me feel uncomfortable,” had a mean score of 2.00 and standard deviation of 1.323. One participant strongly agreed with this statement (11.1%); one indicated neutral (11.1%); three disagreed (33.3%); and four strongly disagreed (44.4%).

Table 4.4

*Survey Items Pertaining to Schlossberg's Third Focus Area on Faculty*

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
My experience-based comments are accepted by my professors <i>N=9, M=4.11, SD=.928</i> Missing=0	3	33.30%	5	55.60%	0	0.00%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%
The classroom atmosphere encourages me to speak out in class <i>N=9, M=3.56, SD=1.509</i> Missing=0	3	33.30%	3	33.30%	0	0.00%	2	22.20%	1	11.10%
Classes are offered at times that are good for me <i>N=9, M=3.33, SD=1.236</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	5	55.60%	1	11.10%	1	11.10%	1	11.10%
The faculty and administrators are sensitive to my other responsibilities <i>N=9, M=3.33, SD=1.225</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	4	44.40%	2	22.20%	1	11.10%	1	11.10%
My professors interpret assertiveness as a challenge to their authority <i>N=9, M=3.22, SD=1.302</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	4	44.40%	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	1	11.10%
My questions seem to put faculty members on the defensive <i>N=9, M=2.44, SD=1.333</i> Missing=0	0	0.00%	3	33.30%	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	3	33.30%
My professors sometimes ignore my comments or questions <i>N=9, M=2.44, SD=1.424</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	2	22.20%	3	33.30%

I sometimes feel my professors want me to hurry up and finish speaking <i>N</i> =9, <i>M</i> =2.44, <i>SD</i> =1.424 Missing=0	1	11.10%	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	2	22.20%	3	33.30%
My professors seem to recognize other students but not me <i>N</i> =9, <i>M</i> =2.33, <i>SD</i> =1.225 Missing=0	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	2	22.20%	4	44.40%	2	22.20%
Some of the jokes my professors tell me make me feel uncomfortable <i>N</i> =9, <i>M</i> =2.00, <i>SD</i> =1.323 Missing=0	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	1	11.10%	3	33.30%	4	44.40%

Table 4.5 contains the results of 13 survey items based on Schlossberg’s Fourth Focus Area on Multiple Roles. The Likert-type survey items are arranged from strongly agree=5; agree=4; neutral=3; disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1. Mean scores are arranged from highest to lowest. For the purpose of this study, a mean score of 3.0 and above indicates a level of agreement in response to a survey item and a mean score below 3.0 indicates a level of disagreement in response to a survey item.

The highest ranked item, “There has always been someone on campus that could help me when I had a question or problem,” had a mean score of 4.33 and standard deviation 1.00. Five participants (55.6%) strongly agreed with this statement; three agreed (33.3%); and one disagreed (11.1%). The second item, “The school newspaper doesn’t discuss student issues that are relevant to me,” had a mean score of 3.33 and standard deviation 1.00. One participant (11.1%) strongly agreed with this item; three agreed (33.3%); three indicated neutral (33.3%); and two disagreed (22.2%). The third item, “The university’s policy of transfer penalizes students,” had a mean score of 3.33 and standard deviation 1.00. Five participants agreed (55.6%) with this statement; three

indicated neutral (33.3%); and one strongly disagreed (11.1%). The eleventh, “The university offers alternatives to the traditional semester-length courses,” had a mean score of 2.22 and standard deviation of 1.302. Two participants (22.2%) agreed with this statement; two indicated neutral (22.2%); one disagreed (11.1%); and four strongly disagreed (44.4%). The twelfth item, “Departmental rules sometimes make my goals difficult or impossible,” had a mean score of 2.22 and standard deviation 1.093. One participant (11.1%) agreed with this statement; three indicated neutral (33.3%); two disagreed (22.2%); and three strongly disagreed (33.3%). The last item, “I feel my activity fees are spent in a way that is meaningful to me,” had a mean score of 2.11 and standard deviation 1.269. Two participants (22.2%) agreed with this statement; one indicated neutral (11.1%); two disagreed (22.2%); and four strongly disagreed (44.4%).



Table 4.5

*Survey Items Pertaining to Schlossberg's Fourth Focus Area on Multiple Roles*

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
There has always been someone on campus that could help me when I had a question or problem <i>N=9, M=4.33, SD=1.000</i> Missing=0	5	55.60%	3	33.30%	0	0.00%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%
The school newspaper doesn't discuss student issues that are relevant to me <i>N=9, M=3.33, SD=1.000</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	3	33.30%	3	33.30%	2	22.20%	0	0.00%
The university's policy of transfer penalizes student <i>N=9, M=3.33, SD=1.000</i> Missing=0	0	0.00%	5	55.60%	3	33.30%	0	0.00%	1	11.10%
It takes too long to register or correct registration problems <i>N=9, M=3.00, SD=1.000</i> Missing=0	0	0.00%	3	33.30%	4	44.40%	1	11.10%	1	11.10%
I will have a hard time finishing my degree because of time limits completing my work <i>N=9, M=2.89, SD=1.167</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	1	11.10%	5	55.60%	0	0.00%
The classroom desks are uncomfortable <i>N=9, M=2.89, SD=1.269</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	2	22.20%	3	33.30%	1	11.10%
I sometimes feel alone and isolated at the university <i>N=9, M=2.78, SD=1.481</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	5	55.60%	1	11.10%
Sometimes I feel out of place in the classroom <i>N=9, M=2.56, SD=1.590</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	0	0.00%	2	22.20%	2	22.20%	3	33.30%
Campus rules and regulations seem to have been made for someone other than me <i>N=9, M=2.33, SD=1.118</i> Missing=0	0	0.00%	2	22.20%	1	11.10%	4	44.40%	2	22.20%

It's hard for me to adjust to the school environment <i>N</i> =9, <i>M</i> =2.22, <i>SD</i> =1.302 Missing=0	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	2	22.20%	3	33.30%	3	33.30%
The university offers alternatives to the traditional semester-length courses <i>N</i> =9, <i>M</i> =2.22, <i>SD</i> =1.302 Missing=0	0	0.00%	2	22.20%	2	22.20%	1	11.1	4	44.40%
Departmental rules sometimes make my goals difficult or impossible <i>N</i> =9, <i>M</i> =2.22, <i>SD</i> =1.093 Missing=0	0	0.00%	1	11.10%	3	33.30%	2	22.20%	3	33.30%
I feel my activity fees are spent in a way that is meaningful to me <i>N</i> =9, <i>M</i> =2.11, <i>SD</i> =1.269 Missing=0	0	0.00%	2	22.20%	1	11.10%	2	22.20%	4	44.40%

Table 4.6 contains the results of 10 survey items based on Schlossberg's Fifth Focus Area on Peers. The Likert-type survey items are arranged from strongly agree=5; agree=4; neutral=3; disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1. Mean scores are arranged from highest to lowest. For the purpose of this study, a mean score of 3.0 and above indicates a level of agreement in response to a survey item and a mean score below 3.0 indicates a level of disagreement in response to a survey item.

The first item, "I have a good relationship with my classmates," had a mean score of 4.33 and standard deviation of .707. Four participants strongly agreed with this statement (44.4%); four agreed (44.4%); and one indicated neutral (11.1%). The second item, "I have had adequate opportunities to get to know fellow students," had a mean score of 4.00 and standard deviation of 1.225. Three participants strongly agreed with this statement (33.3%); five agreed (55.6%); and one strongly disagreed (11.1%). The third item, "My classmates would help me catch up to the new technologies if I need it," had a

mean score of 3.89 and standard deviation 1.167. Two participants agreed with this statement (22.2%); six agreed (66.6%); and one strongly disagreed (11.1%).

The eighth item, “My age sometimes gets in the way of my interactions with other students,” had a mean score of 3.44 and standard deviation 1.236. Two participants strongly agreed (22.2%); three agreed (33.3%); one indicated neutral (11.1%); and three disagreed (33.3%). The ninth item, “Unless I have another student like me in class, no one really understands how hard it is to be here,” had a mean score of 2.44 and standard deviation 1.236. One participant strongly agreed with this statement (11.1%); one agreed (11.1%); six disagreed (66.7%); and one strongly disagreed (11.1%). The final item, “Fellow students don’t seem to listen to me when I share my experiences,” had a mean score of 2.00 and standard deviation .866. One participant agreed with this statement (11.1%); six disagreed (66.7%); and two strongly disagreed (22.2%).

Table 4.6

*Survey Items Pertaining to Schlossberg's Fifth Focus Area on Peers*

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Neutral</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
I have a good relationship with my classmates <i>N=9, M=4.33, SD=.707</i> Missing=0	4	44.40%	4	44.40%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
I have had adequate opportunities to get to know fellow students <i>N=9, M=4.00, SD=1.225</i> Missing=0	3	33.30%	5	55.60%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	11.10%
My classmates would help me catch up to the new technologies if I need it <i>N=9, M=3.89, SD=1.167</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	6	66.70%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	11.10%
I feel welcome on campus <i>N=9, M=3.89, SD=.928</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	5	55.60%	1	11.10%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%
I feel my classmates react positively to my experience and knowledge <i>N=9, M=3.89, SD=.928</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	5	55.60%	1	11.10%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%
I get support from my classmates when I need it <i>N=9, M=3.78, SD=1.202</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	5	55.60%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	1	11.10%
I feel like I fit in my classes <i>N=9, M=3.78, SD=1.394</i> Missing=0	3	33.30%	4	44.40%	0	0.00%	1	11.10%	1	11.10%
My age sometimes gets in the way of my interactions with other students <i>N=9, M=3.44, SD=1.236</i> Missing=0	2	22.20%	3	33.30%	1	11.10%	3	33.30%	0	0.00%
Unless I have another student like me in class, no one really understands how hard it is to be here <i>N=9, M=2.44, SD=1.236</i> Missing=0	1	11.10%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	6	66.70%	1	11.10%

Fellow students don't seem to listen to me when I share my experiences	0	0.00%	1	11.10%	0	0.00%	6	66.70%	2	22.20%
<i>N</i> =9, <i>M</i> =2.00, <i>SD</i> =.866										
Missing=0										

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## Qualitative Profile of the Sample

Six interviews were conducted during March and April 2013. The length of each interview varied with two at five minutes, three at 12 minutes, one at 25 minutes, and one at 55 minutes, yielding an overall mean time of 24.25 minutes. All interview participants were randomly selected via telephone, email, or by visiting the Office of Veteran Affairs. A consent form to be audio taped was provided prior to all six interviews (Appendix E); strict confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms; and a debriefing form was provided at the end of the interview protocol (Appendix F).

A biography of each six interview participants is listed below:

Lola is currently in the Army National Guard. She has since returned from Basic and Advanced Individualized Training (AIT). She is a full-time student, employed full-time, and lives off-campus. She defines herself as a non-traditional student. She attends classes and goes straight home to complete other responsibilities outside of school.

Piper served in the Air Force. She joined the military after graduating from high school. She explained that “back then” she took a test that would determine what branch of the military she would serve in. Her test score was high enough to serve in the Air Force or Coast Guard. So, she chose the Air Force. Her father and uncles served in the

military. She expressed how proud she was to follow in their footsteps. She never served out of the country during her time in the Air Force.

Sally served in the Air Force for over four years. She was stationed at an airbase stateside out West and then deployed overseas 40 miles from Baghdad, Iraq. She worked near the flight line where she was exposed to bombing from the enemy. She returned home from Iraq and decided to 'A-76' meaning she was "overmatched in her career field" and therefore decided to opt-out of the service. She is married with children and owns a home.

Zena served in the Air Force for over six years. She entered the military with a Bachelor's degree and attended Officer Training School (OTS). She obtained a Master's degree in Management during her time in the Air Force. Zena was assigned several positions while in the service, one of which involved 500 personnel under her command. While in the service, she met her spouse and deployed out of the country with him. She spoke about her time while deployed overseas and shared stories about the local people in China, Japan, and Hong Kong.

Reagan served in the Marine Corps. She entered the military after high school and returned to college at the age of 26. She did not deploy during her time in the military. She was a Small Arms Technician. She fixed and managed the storage of weapons, transportation of weapons, and overall security of weapons. She was later placed in charge of a facility that housed 300 military personnel.

Annabelle is currently serving in the Army National Guard-Military Police. Her unit is responsible for Homeland Security that includes four Federal Emergency

Management Agency (FEMA) zones. She was deployed during Hurricane Sandy, but has not been out of country as of yet. She is trained for disaster, weather, and terror related events. Her unit is responsible to keep disaster areas safe and coordinate with local officials during times of major emergency and/or crisis.

### **Qualitative Analysis of the Data**

Research Question 2: What are the transformative learning and transition experiences of women student veterans?

“How do you feel about returning to college or going to college after being in the military?”

Content analysis was used to determine participants’ feelings about returning to college after being in the military (Table 4.7). Positive, great, prepared, and overwhelmed were the four main themes discussed with positive as the highest frequency and great and prepared as the lowest frequency. A positive feeling emerged as a theme between three of the participants.

Sally indicated that she experienced a smooth transition when she returned to college. She spoke of taking a year off after returning from the military to transition into civilian life. “I did not go directly into college after the military. I took some time off, so it allowed me to transition into the civilian lifestyle. Everything was ok and I went back to school with no problems.”

Zena shared that it was natural for her to return to school because she had a Bachelor’s degree prior to military service, but expressed wanting to obtain advanced

degrees. She also indicated that she had a negative experience during her time in Officer Training School (OTS).

For me it is natural because I have been going to college since high school, so I never really stopped. I had a Bachelor's degree before I went in the military and then I went through OTS and then I went into the Air force. While I was in the Air Force I worked on a Master's degree. When I got out of the Air Force, I worked on another Bachelor's degree. So, I have been going to college for 25 years.

Reagan discussed that she hated school prior to her military service and that is why she joined. Her perspective on school changed after an incident that had her almost dishonorably discharged and after all was settled, Reagan gained a new outlook on returning to school:

I feel really good returning to school. I usually hate school. I was never really good at it and that is part of why I joined the military because I did not have to go to school. But, while I was in the military I had kind of an accident, more like an incident. While I was "out," someone placed a drug in my drink. The Military Police were called and the person who spoke with the police said I willingly took the drug. I ended up in the hospital. I went through all of these legal actions. So, after the whole experience, all I wanted to do was go to school. They were able to help me out with my whole situation, so I want to be able to do that for someone else. I went from hating school to being really motivated to go to school. I do not know if that was just the military, but my own personal goal.



Annabelle described a feeling of being overwhelmed when she returned to college. She discussed that it was a smooth transition, but hard at the same time:

I took a year off after high school, so it was not that bad. I was constantly busy being in training, so it was a smooth transition, but it was kind of hard to get back to being a studious person. It was hard because I did not have a structured schedule like I had before. It was more so on my own. Everything in the military was decided for me-what I have to do, when I had to be certain places, and what I needed.

Reagan indicated that she felt overwhelmed with a new way of learning and thinking. She discussed “brain dump” as a way of learning information and then letting it go. She experienced “brain dump” while going through boot camp and during her MOS training. She felt anxious about learning new technology in college. She also discussed that the transition from the military to college was a tough adjustment:

I am so used to the way the military kind of teaches you “brain dump,” remember all of this stuff, take the test, pass and then you do not need to know it again. It starts early on in boot camp. There is no way to remember all that stuff. They need you to get to remember all of that stuff, but you get used to this “brain dump.” And then the same thing when you are being trained in your MOS. You go to school, you know this stuff, but they even tell you-you may need to use this, but you probably are going to learn what you are actually going to do once you get to where you are going. So, I am just used to “brain dumping” stuff. So, getting used to college, it is like, it is not so much do what you are told, you

know what is going on, you have to do it yourself and it is more thinking and you have to be responsible for yourself. There is nobody, because you know there is always someone higher up in the military that is responsible for getting everything done. Now I am responsible for myself.

As for the tough adjustment period, Reagan went on to discuss the following experience:

So, being in the military, it is the structure and then coming out to an unstructured environment. Well, being in the military I would say not really structured, it is just disorganized. It is a different kind of structure. I get nervous when things are unfamiliar to me. So, once I learn them, then I am really efficient with them. So, that is why this whole thing makes me anxious because I do not know the technology. I am just not good with computers. I do not know-there is no guideline and if there is, then it is different.

Table 4.7

*Feelings About Returning to College After Being in the Military*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Positive	Smooth transition	3	1
	No problems		
	Motivated to obtain multiple or advanced Degrees		
	New outlook on learning		
	Helped me socially		
Overwhelmed	Lack of structure	2	2
	Hard transition due to increased responsibility and independence		
	Tough adjustment		
Great	Opportunity for career change	1	3
	Extend educational field		
Prepared	Ability to set and achieve goals	1	4
	Total Frequency		

“Can you please describe to me your past military experience? For example, what branch of the military, if you went out of the country?”

Content analysis was used to describe past military experience (Table 4.8), branch of service (Table 4.8a), and deployed versus not deployed overseas (Table 4.8b).

Positive, rough, gender-specific role, and transformative were the four themes that emerged. Students discussed positive with the highest frequency and transformative as the lowest frequency. Three served in the Air Force, two in the Army National Guard, and one in the Marine Corps.

Zena described a positive and negative experience while serving in the Air Force. She met her husband while in OTS and was stationed with him overseas. She served in many positions as an officer and gained a lot of experience in supply operations, information management, and satellite operations:

I went into the Air Force OTS as a regular officer, not as a reserve officer. I was in for about 6 ½ years. I went in as a Satellite Operations Officer. While I was in training I met a guy and we dated after we graduated and we were trying to get stationed together. He was going out of the country and I was staying in the States. So, I changed my career field so I could get stationed with him.

As for her negative experience, Zena communicated that she was sexually assaulted by a foreign military officer while in OTS:

I had an experience in OTS that was not good. I was in the Base Exchange (BS) and I was shopping in the base store. A foreign officer was in there and was going to school at the same time as me (OTS). I did not know him and he came up to me and we started talking. He then asked me my name and opened up my jacket and grabbed my breast. I reported it and I did not have a good experience. Actually, Social Actions (SA) was brought in. Social Actions is like an advocate for the military member. Its, umm, I am trying to think of what an equivalent would be. It is like a patient advocate, like in a hospital, but this is for the military. They work with like racism, things like that. So, they (SA) had contacted me when they found out and they made me write a statement. They were trying to get the Base Commander to do something about it. The base commander called me into his

office and yelled at me for going to SA. I explained that I did not go there, but that they (SA) contacted me. And the base commander said, “What are you trying to do to me?” You know, making it seem like it was my fault for bringing this up and going to SA and not following the chain of command.

You do not have to go through the chain of command to go to SA. I never went to SA anyway. So, I had a very negative experience about that. I was real new to it. I did not want to “step on anyone’s toes.” So, I was trying to do what I could because I did not want to get kicked out (of OTS) and that is what I was afraid of. In the meantime, SA was trying to get pictures of the foreign students for me to identify who it was and the base commander was delaying the process and then I found out that the students were only there for two weeks. So, now it is three weeks later and they (foreign students) had left. So, nothing happened. I was never told of what happened. I just know it “fizzled” out and that was it. So, that experience really got to me. I did not really trust the “higher ups” that much and I am a very trusting person. So, I would say, I was very afraid to make “waves” and I just did what I had to do. A chaplain came and talked to me. I talked to him and everything was fine with him and I felt safe. You know, like, protected. So, I learned to trust the chaplains. That was the main experience. That was a negative experience (with foreign officer and base commander). It did not weigh heavily on me as you might think because I got over it. I remember it. But, I was told it might be sexist. After that experience I never had any problems, anyone not helping me, protecting me, whatever. I just felt that experience was bad-just

because the base commander probably had a bad “mark” against him. Now, somebody (Zena) had complained without going through his chain (of command) or whatever.

Reagan talked about helping and training recruits before they were deployed overseas. She did not deploy, but felt that her job was important as it helped others learn how to operate a weapon. “I worked on the ranges where I trained people how to shoot. So, I got to spend a lot of time in that environment. I helped and trained people before they got deployed. I still felt as though I was involved and engaged.”

Annabelle spoke of acting in a leadership role. “You are supposed to act above your own rank. During some situations you may act as though you are in another rank. You have to take that leadership position. It is good to know a couple of ranks above you and all of them underneath you because you never know.” Lola said she liked being in the military because it gave her life skills.

Past military experience was positive for some, but others spoke of different experiences. Sally and Reagan discussed serving in a gender-specific role as a woman in the military. Sally was deployed 40 miles from Iraq. She talked about working near the flight line where attacks from the enemy occurred. She also indicated that as woman in a war zone she was not allowed off base:

My experience in Iraq was a lot different being in the Air Force. You know, a lot different than other branches. Being a woman, I was not allowed off the base. It was more being secluded to one area. I worked near the flight line, so working

there was the most heavily attacked place. It was rough, but we made it through, thank God.

Reagan shared that a recruiter told her that there were limited jobs for females. She expressed that others feel as though females cannot do anything but serve in administrative or non-combat roles. She also talked about a negative experience while in the military, but persevered and the experience changed her:

Even when you go to a recruiter, there are quotas that they need to fill and they only told me there were four jobs for females. There are a lot of jobs for females, but they only told me that I could work the “chow hall,” an armory, or motor-T. But they gave me other options either secretary or finance. They kind of put females in those jobs in the beginning. They were kind of like worried about me coming into the military. We have a female now and we have to worry about her. We can’t say certain things, do certain things, but I ended up being worse than all of them. They expected these things, but I fitted in. I proved them wrong.

Reagan also talked about a negative experience while serving in the military and how it changed her:

They make it really hard when you are in, even if you do not get into trouble. They tried to kick me out because I was pending a dishonorable discharge. I was trying to fight for my honorable discharge and my G.I. Bill. Yes, that experience changed me because I used to party a lot. I was like whatever, I am unstoppable and nothing is ever going to happen to me. Everyone can become a statistic. There

are things that can happen in this world that young students are not even aware of.

I am extremely motivated to be here.

Table 4.8

*Description of Past Military Experience (N=6)*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Positive	Gained life skills	5	1
	Military career success		
	Following family tradition		
	Opportunity for career advancement		
	Met spouse		
	Proud		
	Proved people wrong		
	Experience to help others		
	Fulfilling		
	Leadership		
Rough	Deployed in war zone	2	2
	Court martialed		
	Isolated from others		
Gender Specific Role	Not allowed off base	2	3
	Non-combat roles		
	Increased concern due to gender		
Transformative	Changed perspective on life	1	4
	Total Frequency		



Table 4.8a

*Branch of Military Service*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Air Force		3	1
Army National Guard		2	2
Marine Corps		1	3
	Total Frequency	6	

Table 4.8b

*Deployed versus Not Deployed*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Not Deployed			
Overseas		4	1
Deployed Overseas		2	2
	Total Frequency	6	

“Do you find that having been in the military differentiates you from other college students? Why or why not?”

Content analysis was used to determine how military service differentiates women veterans from other college students (Table 4.9). A new perspective, personal growth, and specialized training were the three main themes shared by participants. New perspective was identified as the highest frequency with specialized training as the lowest frequency.

Piper identified that military service provided her a different learning experience, new skill, and a sense of being part of a team:

Definitely. I think maybe it is because of my age too. I learned different things in the military. A lot of these kids coming out of high school- their world is all about them. I think when you come out of the military, you have to think globally and act as a team. So, I notice in the classes that I tend to be more of a team player, like I will speak up. Where other people are in their own little world and do not want to speak up. Also, when it comes to sharing notes, I notice that I am trying to help everyone. It is not about "I want my grade to be better" or "it is all about me and my passing this class" and I do know it has something to do with military experience.

Zena communicated that her military experience enhanced her personal growth, maturity, and responsibility:

I would say my first instinct is yes because you grow up quick in the military. You do not have your family with you. You do not have people to do things for you, like, umm, write your checks, you have to learn quickly. You are responsible for you and you alone. So, it is different than having been living with your parents through college and it made me grow up fast. Like I said I had a big responsibility at 23 years old. Also, what would differentiate me is traveling around the world too. I got to see a lot of other countries and ours too. So, that experience comes into the classroom when you are talking about other places that some other people

have not been to. Also, the training you have is not like anything a civilian had gone through. So, it makes you, I cannot say better, but more prepared.

Zena also shared that she gained a “worldly education” during her military career: The local people worked in the Air Force as civilians and so I had dealings with them in my own squadron. I did a lot of activities outside of the base. It was a huge base, so you do not even have to go out of the base to live there. You can stay there the whole time. Everything you need is there. But I would go out scuba diving, exploring, biking. I had a lot of dealings with the people. I found them to be great. Nice people, always happy and smiling, it was good. It gave me a different perspective on other countries. How good we have it in our country (United States). I had a worldly education. I am a person who thinks that everybody should go into the military for a couple of years just to get the training, be prepared to protect your country, your family, and then appreciate what you have. And then come out and be a civilian.

Annabelle’s experience in the military allowed her to apply her training directly to college coursework:

My major is criminal justice and it is a lot of what I do in the military I can relate to it my training. I feel like it prepared me for my classes. I knew an overall basis and you have to consider what criminal justice is in comparison to the civilian world. It is a lot different, but same overall concepts, so I felt like that helped me have an upper hand when it came to classes because I was at least familiar with the subject. It was easier to understand the coursework because I actually got to

apply a lot of it to training. We do a lot of scenarios for training-it becomes muscle memory. Learning the “book kind of side” to it, it helped me have a better understanding why and reading it, it helped me to remember a lot of stuff.

Table 4.9

*Difference of Veterans from Other College Students (N=6)*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
New Perspective	Unique learning experiences	3	1
	Selfless		
	Think globally		
	Act as a team player		
	Ability to voice thoughts in classroom		
	Worldly education		
Personal Growth	Prepared to protect country and family	2	2
	Appreciate what you have		
	Becoming responsible		
	Mature quickly		
	Respect for other cultures		
	Perseverance		
Specialized Training	Apply training to coursework	1	3
	Experience that can be used in "real world"		
	Total Frequency		

“Do you feel as though the military prepared you for college life?”

Content analysis was used to determine feelings of being prepared for college life after serving in the military (Table 4.10). Prepared and not prepared were the two main themes discussed during the interview. Prepared was the highest frequency and not prepared was the lowest frequency. Participants discussed how military experience not only prepared them for college life, but life in general. Lola explained, “The military prepared me for college life and gave me physical preparation to be a student and worker

for a busy life.” Annabelle stressed that the military placed her on a different level in college. As a result of her military service, she felt more independent and responsible.

Piper described that the military prepared her for her goals and what she needed to do as a mother and nurse:

I feel like the military prepared me for life in general. Like I said, the way I think, feel, act and do things, you know goals that I need to do-as a mother and as a nurse. I know what my goals are and I know what I have to do and I just do it. If emotions come in, I can give you an example. I remember when my daughter was six. I had just got home and she was riding a bike. She had put her feet in the wheels and the bike flipped. She knocked her teeth out and we had to call the ambulance. I did everything that I had to do. I got her to the hospital and when the lady asked me for the insurance cards that is when I started crying. Military life prepared me for college life. I had certification classes as a nurse, but they did not count as credit. I took those at night. The first college I attended was all on-line and I had a military advisor there who was in the Navy. It was a good thing because we military people think the same way. It was really good to back into college to achieve my goals. So, I do feel that the military prepared me for college life.

Zena gained relevant skills while in Officer Training School (OTS). She discussed that she is a better speaker and writer; is great with time management; and arrives to appointments on time:

Actually, when I think about OTS, it did prepare me for college because I was a terrible writer. I did not know how to write papers. I did not know how to write speeches and speak in front of people. It taught me all those things and while I was in the military, I had to do speeches for generals. So, I had to get that out. I am not too afraid to speak in public, but put me in a big crowd and I am scared. But, I can speak in front of a classroom. It helped me with time management, being on time for appointments, “cramming” because in OTS and regular military you are always pressured to get things done, being responsible for getting assignments in on time. Almost like a perfectionist type of way, like I need to get things in on time. I need to do well. I think the Air Force made that even stronger. Reagan discussed that the military did not really prepare her for college life.

When she arrived to college, she was unprepared for the technology:

Yes and no. I do not think they tried to. The military didn’t teach me as much as I learned from them. Like, I took things from different experiences that other people didn’t get. They always tell you to take classes while you are there. I was not prepared for the technology at all when I got to school. Like if you didn’t have a cell phone or laptop, then I wasn’t going to make it. They do not prepare you for any of that stuff. They just prepare you for what you need to know. You become prepared just because of your experience. It prepares you to be prepared for the unfamiliar. But for college, not so much.

Sally also felt that the military did not prepare her for the college environment.

She shared similar feelings as Annabelle did:

No not at all. I mean it is not something that they care about too much. I mean, it is the job (in the military). When you are in the military, it is just your job and that is what you have to focus on and prepare for. They do offer college (classes) and you can do that if you want, but they do not really push it.

Table 4.10

*Feeling Prepared for College Life After Being in the Military (N=6)*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Prepared	Unfamiliar situations	5	1
	Physical Fitness		
	Role as mother		
	Role as nurse		
	Time management		
	Public speaking		
	Writing		
	Independence		
	Working under pressure		
	Achieve goals		
Not prepared	Technology	2	2
	Emphasis on duty to military job, not college		
Total Frequency		7	

Research Question 3: What are the educational and social needs of returning women veterans?

“Discussing the G.I. Bill, was it difficult for you to understand and how to access those services?”

Content analysis was used to describe the level of difficulty to understand the G.I. Bill (Table 4.11). Easy to understand and challenging was communicated by the participants. Easy to understand was the highest frequency and challenging was the lowest frequency.

Sally said that it was not difficult for her to understand the G.I. Bill. “No. Not really. I had great people at another college who told me about the programs-*Post 9/11 G.I. Bill* and the same here at Stockton. So, it was a smooth transition. I just wish it was more money.”

Zena described a process that was not really difficult for her as she had support services during Out Processing from the military and at Richard Stockton College:

No, not at all. I was told that if I put in \$100 per month for a year, which is \$1,200 for my time, I would get a stipend for a certain amount each month while I went to school for about three years, I think it was. What I did not understand about the process was that if I went part-time I would use it up. I thought that I could go six years part-time instead of three years part-time, but that’s not the case. So, if you take one class, you are using your time up. I did not know that, but I found that out here (current college). The financial aid representative explained it to me here. Before I got out of the military the G.I. Bill was discussed. The only part I did not understand was the part that was explained to me here. Any questions I had for the school was explained here at Stockton. I did not have a problem with the G.I. Bill. So, during “Out Processing” from the military, someone explained to me the G.I. Bill and also before I went into the military. It is explained to you before OTS. So, you either do it or you do not. I did it. But, my husband did not, the guy I met. He wound up staying in 20 years, so, he really did not need the G.I. Bill. I am glad that I did it. It was \$36,000-that is what you got back. You put \$1,200 in and got \$36,000 out of it.



Reagan experienced a variety of issues with military support services, a former college representative, and customer service representatives at The Veterans Administration. At her former college, Reagan explained that when she inquired about the G.I. Bill, she felt the representative treated her like “cattle” and as if she was dumb:

Some of it is and some of it isn't. I know a general amount of all of them (G.I. Bill). There are all of these little things about it that I am hearing from others in school. So, I am still learning everything. Because the other guys in my class are just getting used to this too. They were here a semester before me. I have to start learning the terminology. I just needed more information. I was given wrong information when I was still in the military. They give you a Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class to transition out of the military. When I was checking out, I did not always get the right answers, so I do not trust people, it's like they didn't care what answer they were giving me. It is everywhere in the military, school, and business. I wanted to go back to school at my former college. I called the school and no one returned my phone call. I got a hold of someone and she was not nice. She yelled at me while I was on the phone because I did not understand what she was telling me. It was like I was dumb. I felt like I was just “cattle.” When I came to Stockton they were really helpful.

Annabelle described that the G.I. Bill was easy to understand, but confusing. “It was easy to understand, but very confusing to call all these places to see how I get my benefits in order so I would not have to pay for school. A lot of the employees at

Stockton helped me. I had no idea what I was doing. Administrative people at our unit also helped.”

Table 4.11

*Level of Difficulty to Understanding the G.I. Bill (N=6)*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Easy to Understand	No problems	4	1
	Explained during basic training		
	School representative explained		
	Explained during "out processing" from military		
	Smooth transition		
Challenging	Did not get right answers	2	2
	Had to call many places		
	Confusing		
	Treated like "cattle"		
	Treated as if I was dumb		
	Received inaccurate information		
	Sent all over base to find answers		
	Tough transition		
	Total Frequency	6	

“With regards to campus life, how do you like the campus atmosphere? Why or why not?”

Content analysis was used to determine the campus atmosphere (Table 4.12).

Dislike and like were the main themes participants spoke about. Dislike was the highest frequency and like was the lowest frequency. Participants noted that they liked administrators, staff, and professors. One participant did not like the “commuter school” atmosphere and a lack of overall student involvement in clubs and organizations.

Piper did not like the campus atmosphere due to a number of concerns. She felt more connected to her academic major at her internship in a local clinic:

This is hard for me to explain. I do not like the campus atmosphere. I do not like to be around a mass of people. I do not know how that sounds. I do not know if that has to do with the military or not, it is just mass confusion. So, that is why I do not like the campus. Being in my academic major I am actually lucky to be down at the clinic a lot because I am in my junior year. So, I do not have to be on the campus as much. I can be down at the clinic because it is what I like to do. It is a 'closed atmosphere.' A lot of times I do not like to hear what people say, like I do not like to hear the f-word screamed. I get insulted of what people say. So, I just think it is juvenile. I do not like being on the campus too much.

Sally liked the campus atmosphere due to numerous activities and feeling part of something:

I love the campus atmosphere. There are so many things that you can do and a lot of it is geared towards family too. I mean we have dodge ball, which I currently am active in. There is free bowling night. There are just different things to get you out there and no matter who you are, you feel you can be a part of something.

Zena noted that she likes the school atmosphere; however, she disliked a few other aspects of campus life. "I like the atmosphere here. I like the school. The one thing that I would have to complain about, I wish was better, was that it was not so much of a commuter school. That the students stayed here for clubs and things people because are not really involved. Nobody wants to do anything because they want to go home.

Table 4.12

*Perceptions of Campus Atmosphere (N=6)*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Dislike	Too many people	4	1
	Commuter college		
	Mass confusion		
	Get insulted by what people say		
	People not involved		
	Living on campus		
Like	Lots of activities	2	2
	Feel part of something		
	Great atmosphere		
	Students are nice		
	A lot of activities geared towards families		
	Employees		
	Total Frequency		

“Are you a traditional student? For example, do you live on campus, are you a full-time student, and maybe have a part-time job, or other?” Please specify.

Content analysis was used to describe student classification (Table 4.13). All six participants were non-traditional students. Five participants were taking classes full time or part time and employed full time or part time. One was not employed because school was the highest priority. Lola said, “I have a full-time job. I do not live on campus. I am a non-traditional student and here for classes only. I go straight home and do my own business.” Sally stated, “Well, I am married with children and own a home. So, I do not live on campus. I would be your non-traditional student. Annabelle lived on campus her first year, then off campus. “I have been a full time student since I started. I lived on campus for the first year and then after that I lived off campus. That was a lot easier with my work schedule and school.”

Table 4.13

*Student Classification (N=6)*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Non-Traditional	Homeowner	6	1
	Live in apartment off campus		
	Married		
	Full time job		
	Go straight home		
	Part time job		
	Graduate student		
	Total Frequency	6	

Research Question 4: How well do women student veterans report that Stockton is meeting those needs?

“What should Richard Stockton College do to provide in services, to help your time on campus be more veteran friendly?”

Content analysis was used to reveal how Richard Stockton College could improve services for veterans and help their time on campus be more veteran friendly (Table 4.14). Pleased with current services and services needing improvement were the main themes discussed. Pleased with current services was the highest frequency and services needing improvement was the lowest frequency. One participant noted that she felt a sense of “community” as a member of the SVO; another spoke of an easy transition because of staff; and one felt as though the financial aid representative needed more help.

Lola highlighted that the veteran lounge and Student Veterans Organization meetings are important aspects of the college:

I appreciate a lot of what Stockton does. I like the veteran lounge where veterans can go and talk, it is only for veterans. I like to go to the meetings where I can get

more information, help, and learn about events. Stockton provides a lot of services. I cannot say if they can really do anymore.

Zena was pleased with current services at Stockton College. She was especially happy with the staff and administration:

I think they are doing a good job. Before they had the SVO, the financial aid representative was pretty much my point of contact for everything and then they got the SVO because they have a point of contact, they have good advocates (staff and administration) for the students and just great people. I do not think there is anything they can do to help us even more than that. I think Stockton is Veteran Friendly. I went to another school in New Jersey as an undergraduate before the military. I do not remember seeing anything for the veterans. That was a long time ago. Here, I think they really “cater” to the veterans. I feel as though I am supported here and that I matter here. I think that the service we have done is appreciated by the college. I just feel like it is important here that people be recognized and I think the school does that.

Table 4.14

*Needed Services to Make the Campus More Veteran Friendly (N=6)*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Pleased With Current Services	Super friendly	6	1
	Veteran lounge		
	Appreciated by college		
	Feel like I matter		
	Student Veteran Organization (SVO)		
	Point of contact		
	Easy transition because of staff		
	Veteran advocates		
	Caring staff		

	Recognized Service appreciated by college Office of Veteran Affairs		
Services Needing Improvement	Bigger veteran lounge More help for financial aid representatives Total Frequency	2   8	2

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“How can the needs of returning war veterans be better met?”

Content analysis was used to determine the needs of returning war veterans (Table 4.15). Mental health needs, improving handicap access on campus, and problems with the Veterans Administration were communicated during the interview. Mental health needs was the highest frequency and the Veterans Administration was the lowest frequency.

Josie was concerned with the handicap access around campus. She expressed that the campus center was not friendly for persons with physical disabilities:

I think that this campus has got to be friendlier towards handicaps. A lot of these guys are coming back missing limbs. My sons are now in the military and their friends. A lot of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and I think the campus needs to realize this. It is not very easy for a handicap person to get around here. The elevators are not working half the time, there are not a lot of ramps, and there are a lot of steps. I mean it looks beautiful, but the campus center itself isn't really handicap friendly. So, they really need to think about this. These young guys are coming back and have a life ahead of them. They are missing limbs and all. They need a lot of help.

Zena suggested that a PTSD support group would help returning war veterans.

She mentioned that the Learning Access Program has helped her in the classroom:

I think they need to have a PTSD support group, if they do not have one yet. I think that the individuals need to be contacted on a one-on-one basis, which I think the staff is contacting all the veterans. But, if that is not being done, I think that would be important as part of the orientation. If they do not have it already, they need to have a separate orientation for veterans. I came in after, so I do not know if they do. I got out of the military on an honorable discharge, but medically. And the VA system has been great to me and so has the school. The college has a Learning Access Program that helps me. I have a disability. So, if anyone needs to take notes, for example, they have been there for me. A staff member has helped me too. So in that respect they are good too.

Reagan has encountered some obstacles with the Veterans Administration and spoke of how certain medical issues cut into her class time.

The VA hospital is a pain. Who wants to go to the hospital in Philadelphia and wait four hours? They make it so hard and difficult. That is why I go to my family doctor. Some guys have been waiting since 2003 for their disability claim and they are not getting back pay. The health issues are cutting into my class time.

You have to pay out of pocket. You end up not going to the VA. Paperwork takes forever to process. You call different people and get different answers. Stockton is really good at doing things here. I have seen personal issues with people in the classroom. You can't stop certain noises and people from wearing certain things.

The healthcare needs to connect.



Table 4.15

*Improving the Needs of Returning War Veterans (N=6)*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Mental Health Needs	Counseling	5	1
	Psychologists		
	Better transition during out processing		
	PTSD support group		
	Contact veterans on a one-on-one basis		
	College class specific to veterans health care		
	Challenges		
Handicap Access Improvements	Campus needs to be more friendly towards people with physical disabilities	1	2
	Not a lot of ramps on campus		
	Elevators not working half of the time		
	A lot of steps		
	Campus center not friendly for people with handicaps		
Veteran Administration	Paperwork takes forever	1	3
	Pay a lot out of pocket		
	Different answers from many people		
	Total Frequency		

Research Question 5: What recommendations do they make to improve services to women veterans returning to the college environment?

“Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to inform me of? Do you have any questions?”

Content analysis was used to determine additional information to improve services for women veterans (Table 4.16). The college system, SVO meetings, and the classroom were the three major themes communicated during the interview. Two of the participants expressed additional services to be improved on campus. Annabelle said, “I

know that a professor tried to reach out to some female veterans and did not get a response-that was in the classroom environment.”

Reagan was concerned about learning the technology at Stockton and getting more female veterans involved in the SVO meetings:

The biggest thing from the military to school is completely different. Like, the technology I just feel like I wasn't prepared for what I need to know. Colleges and the military use a lot of acronyms and Stockton uses a lot of them too. Maybe it is just a generation thing-maybe they should have a technology orientation or crash course on how the college system works. Just introduce us to the technology and what we need to look for. Like, I did not know what a preceptor was. Just introduce us to their (college) systems. I did not know I had holds on my record. A lot of the grunts do not use computers. Everyone in society thinks you know the technology and I still want to be able to function if the power or Internet goes out. I want to be able to know how to do things on my own. We are trying to understand why we are not getting enough females at the meetings. I am going to go and if it is like, oh there are all guys, then, I will be there too. I only met one female veteran. Where are they? What is the reason? Maybe they are scared, intimidated. It won't be as "creepy" if I can help out a guy get more female veterans, then I will.

Table 4.16

*Additional Information to Improve Veteran Services (N=6)*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
College System	Acronyms	1	1
	Technology orientation		
	How to use blackboard		
SVO Meetings	Get more female veterans involved	1	2
Classroom	More female veterans need to share Experiences	1	3
	Total Frequency	3	

## Chapter V

### Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Summary of the Study

The study investigated how women student veterans feel as though they matter at Richard Stockton College; their transformative learning experiences; and their transition experiences in the United States Armed Forces and Richard Stockton College. Based on Dahan's (2008) study, a mixed-methods research design was used to collect, analyze, and combine both quantitative and qualitative data. The mixed-methods research method was implemented to provide a broader approach to the research problem.

A total of 30 women student veterans were identified through an internal college database. Of that number, nine subjects voluntarily completed *The Veteran Student Survey on Transition into College* (Dahan, 2008). Five focus areas that included administration, advising, faculty, multiple roles and peers were analyzed using descriptive statistics to gauge women student veterans' attitudes of mattering on campus.

A taped interview protocol was conducted with six participants who voluntarily completed *Interview Questions for Veteran Students* (Dahan, 2008). Pseudonyms were used to adhere to strict anonymity. All six interviews were conducted one time only and spanned an average of 24.25 minutes. Content analysis was used to determine transformative learning and transition experiences of women student veterans enrolled

full-time or part-time during spring 2013. Interviews were transcribed, various themes analyzed, and then tabulated based on frequency and rank order. Sisco's (1981) *Rules and Procedures for Logical Analysis of Written Data* were employed as a guide for analyzing all qualitative data.

### **Quantitative Discussion of the Findings**

Research Question 1: What do selected Richard Stockton College women student veterans report regarding the five focus areas of mattering on the college campus?

Dahan's (2008) study, found that, based on the findings from the *Veteran Survey Transition into College*, most undergraduate veterans reported to be content with their college experience at Rowan University. As cited by Dahan (2008), Schlossberg et al. (1989) transition theory discusses the 4 Ss for coping with change: situation, self, support, and strategies. Dahan (2008) goes on to define the 4 Ss and writes, "the knowledge base confirms that many adult students feel they have well-transitioned into the university setting" (p. 47). Furthermore, Dahan (2008) reported that, "respondents answered the (MHE) questions based on their perceptions of the Rowan University experience. Overall, the veteran students surveyed reported being satisfied with these five areas of Rowan" (p. 47).

Although several items were altered on the *Veteran Student Survey on Transition into College* from the *MHE* to gauge an overall sense of student veterans' transition into college and not perceptions of mattering (Dahan, 2008; Schlossberg et al., 1990), the findings in this study uncovered that transition experiences were not related to the first research question of this study. Instead, overall feelings of mattering on the college

campus, based on the five areas or subscales of the *MHE*: administration, advising, faculty, multiple roles, and peers were central in answering the first research questions and not on the 4 Ss. In this study, women veteran transition experiences (and transformative learning experiences) were revealed in the qualitative approach to this study (see “Qualitative Discussion of the Findings”). According to Schlossberg et al. (1990), “Scores are generated for each of the subscales. Analyses of subscale intercorrelations suggest that a total instrument score is not interpretable. Consequently, five subscales are obtained and are to be reported individually” (p. 13). Therefore, each of the five *MHE* subscales must be addressed separately:

### **The Need to Matter**

**Administration:** The Administration subscale measures students’ perceptions of mattering in the area of policies and procedures of the college or university. A high score in this area would indicate that students perceive they matter to the administration. According to Dahan (2008), survey results showed that 27.5% agreed or strongly agreed that “The administration sets up policies and procedures to make it easier on themselves rather than the veteran students.” In this study, the second ranked item, “The administration sets things up to be easy for them, not the students,” had a mean score of 3.78. A total of three participants strongly agreed with this statement (33.3%) and three agreed (33.3%) at a total percentage of 66.6%. Dahan (2008) found that a total of 37.3% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement and 27.4% strongly disagreed or disagreed with a mean score of 2.88.

According to Dahan (2008), the data also showed that 25.5% disagreed that “The administration seems to consider veteran students priorities as important” and more than half agreed with a mean score of 3.49. In this study, 77.8% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement with a mean score of 3.67. Lastly, the survey asked whether “The administration makes efforts to accommodate veteran students,” 66.6% of the subjects agreed with this statement and a mean score of 3.75. Based on the (*MHE* survey) responses, more than half of the veteran student population seemed content with the way the administration handled business (students perceived they matter to the administration) at the university (Dahan, 2008). In this study, 55.6% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement with a mean score of 3.44. In this study, the highest rated item, “Administrative staff is helpful in answering my questions,” had a mean score of 4.00. A total of two participants strongly agreed (22.2%) and six (66.7%) agreed with this statement or a total percentage of 88.9% perceived the administrative staff is helpful in answering students’ questions. Dahan (2008) found that 70.5% of participants surveyed reported that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, with a mean score of 0.868. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that women student veterans perceive they matter to the administration.

**Advising:** The Advising Subscale measures how well university advisors respond to student questions, problems, and address issues. A high score in this area would indicate that students perceive advisors as attentive to their needs, available at convenient times or a combination of both (Lucas, 2009). Dahan (2008) concluded that most of the veterans were positive about this aspect, agreeing that an advisor does make the effort, remembers

conversations, and is competent in answering questions. According to Dahan (2008), 51% strongly disagreed or disagreed that “My advisor doesn’t seem to remember things we have discussed before” with a mean score of 2.67. In this study, 55.6% disagreed with this statement with a mean score of 2.67. Furthermore, Dahan (2008), reported that 58.8% strongly agreed or agreed that, “If my advisor does not know the answers to my questions, he or she will seek out the answers,” with a mean score of 3.65. In this study, 77.8% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement and a mean score of 3.67. Based on the findings in this study, it can be concluded that women student veterans perceive that advisors are attentive to their needs and concerns.

**Faculty:** The Faculty Subscale measures students’ perceptions of mattering as a function of the extent to which faculty members accept and include the adult student in the classroom (Lucas, 2009; Schlossberg et al., 1990). A high score in this area may indicate that adult students are recognized in the classroom and for their life experiences (Lucas, 2009). Dahan (2008) determined that most students disagreed with the negative statements such as “the faculty not being sensitive to other responsibilities or their non-recognition of veteran students.”

Overall, this study confirmed that women student veterans perceive that faculty accept and include them in the classroom environment. Dahan (2008) found that 58.6% (mean score of 3.75) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “My experience-based comments are accepted by my professors.” In this study, 88.9% (mean score of 4.11) strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Additionally, Dahan (2008) reported that 72.6% (mean score of 3.61) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “The classroom



atmosphere encourages me to speak out in class.” In this study, 66.6% (mean score of 3.56) strongly agreed or agreed with this statement.

**Multiple Roles:** The Multiple Roles Subscale measures adult students’ perceptions of the extent to which the campus acknowledges competing demands on their time (Schlossberg et al., 1990). A high score in this area would indicate that students are satisfied with access to administrative offices that respects their time on campus. Dahan’s (2008) study showed the highest ranked item, “There has always been someone on campus that could help me when I had a question or problem,” with a mean score of 3.84. A total of 80.3% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. In this study, 88.9% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement with a mean score of 4.33. Dahan (2008) reported that, “The school newspaper doesn’t discuss issues relevant to me,” had a mean score of 3.39; 49% reported neutral; and 43.2% strongly agreed or agreed. In this study, 44.4% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement; 33.3% indicated neutral; with a total mean score of 3.33. Dahan (2008) indicated that, “The university’s policy of transfer penalizes students,” with a mean score of 3.27. A total of 45.1% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. In this study, 55.6% agreed; 33.3% indicated neutral with a total mean score of 3.33. Based on the findings in this study, it can be concluded that women student veterans perceive the campus acknowledges competing demands on their time.

**Peers:** The Peers subscale measures the student's perceptions of the extent to which they feel they belong on campus and are accepted as peers in the classroom (Lucas, 2009; Schlossberg et al., 1990). Environments where high scores are achieved indicate that adult students feel comfortable and fit in the classroom. Dahan (2008) determined the following:

Fifty-one percent of students agreed to receiving support from classmates, and more than 70% felt as though they fit in the classes. However, 43.1% of students felt that unless there was another veteran in the class, no one really understands how hard it is to be there. Although more than 60% of students felt that they had adequate opportunities to get to know fellow students and 75% of veterans felt welcome on campus, there are still 41% of students who felt their experiences sometimes got in the way of their interactions with other students. (p. 50)

In this study, 88.8% strongly agreed or agreed that they have a good relationship with their classmates and 77.7% also felt as though they fit in their classes. However, 66.7% disagreed that, "Unless I have another student like me in class, no one really understands how hard it is to be here" and 88.9% strongly agreed or agreed that, "I have had adequate opportunities to get to know fellow students." Veterans also felt welcome on campus with a total of 77.8% reporting that they strongly agreed or agreed to that statement. However, 55.5% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "My age sometimes gets in the way of my interactions with other students." Overall, based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that women student veterans perceive that they are accepted by their peers.

## **Qualitative Discussion of the Findings**

Research Question 2: What are the transformative learning and transition experiences of women student veterans?

As noted earlier, this research question explored transformative learning experiences and periods of transitions of women student veterans in relation to their military service, and entrance into the college environment. The qualitative analysis of the data was based on Dahan's (2008) *Interview Questions for Veteran Students* with a total of 11 questions that comprised the interview protocol. Questions one, three, seven, and nine were used to uncover specific themes in relation to the above research question.

According to Dahan's (2008) study, transformative learning experiences pointed to how well Rowan University is meeting veterans' needs. Needs were defined as whether the G.I. Bill was easy to access from the (Rowan University) campus services, whether students lived on campus or off campus, and whether students felt welcome in the campus atmosphere (Dahan, 2008).

Qualitative results indicated that "50% of the students lived on campus and 50% lived off campus. Another 25% did not like the campus and try to avoid it as much as possible" (Dahan, 2008, p. 52). The study determined that students who were involved in their academic major, fraternity, or the University resources encountered a transformative learning experience. Additionally, those who did not enjoy the campus resources did not encounter a transformative learning experience.

Specifically, Dahan (2008) points to an interview participant who shared that she takes classes and leaves; campus food prices were ridiculous; and other students were too

young to hang out with because they were in a different point in their lives. Due to this experience, “the student did not form her new frame of reference, which could not transform her points of view leading to a new habit of mind” (Dahan, 2008, p. 52). In this study, these particular feelings may reflect one of the five focus areas of mattering (peers) and not a transformative learning experience. The relevance here is the perception of how adult students matter and are accepted by peers and belong in the classroom (Dahan, 2008; Schlossberg et al., 1990). In this current study, the qualitative findings do not support Dahan’s (2008) claim that a student who feels connected to campus or disconnected from campus encountered a transformative learning experience.

The six interviews in this study revealed key themes and subcategories that suggest women student veterans experience unique transformative learning and transition experiences in relation to military service and as college students. Three participants expressed that returning to college after being in the military was a positive experience. However, others described that the transition into college was a rough experience. A smooth transition; no problems; new outlook on learning; opportunity to obtain advanced degrees; hard transition due to lack of structure; and transformative learning experiences were discussed.

At the time of this study, most women student veterans were in different periods during their transition. Schlossberg et al. (1989) discuss the “transition framework (4 Ss)- situation, self, supports, and strategies-for insights into how they (adult students) can best cope with change” (p. 53). Since women student veterans are adult learners, the findings

of this study support the transition framework of moving in, moving through, and moving on (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

### **Women Veterans Transition Experiences**

**Moving In: Entering the College Environment. Situation:** Five interview participants indicated they were using their G.I. Bill education benefits and one participant talked about using other funding resources to pay for college. All interview participants were attending school voluntarily and some viewed the transition as positive while others did not. The major trigger to attend school was the G.I. Bill-an incentive for years of military service.

**Self:** The G.I. Bill also propelled women veterans to achieve personal and professional goals after the military. Additionally, a role change takes hold here from being a soldier to a student. Reagan was motivated to attend college because of her past experience in high school and a negative experience in the military due to a pending dishonorable discharge. She desired to become a military psychologist, help others through similar situations, and to understand “where the military is going wrong.” From partying in high school and hating it, then being motivated to attend college, Reagan changed her previous self, took on a new identity, and found meaning in the desire to become a psychologist. As for Lola, she was happy to be in college to extend her educational field. It was not just about a career in the military, but that a college degree would supplement her experience. She experienced sense of identity in a role as a soldier with a duty to serve and as a student to advance her career.

**Support:** Many of the participants expressed support from family, parents, and spouses. Richard Stockton College, with its designation of “veteran friendly,” provided appropriate services to support women veterans returning to campus.

**Strategies:** The central question here is what coping strategies exist for women veterans to succeed in college? Participants felt that military service trained them for the demands of college. They shared being prepared and responsible, setting personal goals, gaining time management skills, and taking college seriously.

**Moving Through: Supporting Women Veterans on Campus. Situation:** Each participant described their situation differently. Reagan was concerned about learning new technology; Zena was content since it was natural for her to return to school; and Anabelle felt it was hard to return to “being a studious person.”

**Self:** According to Schlossberg et al. (1989), the self refers to adult learner’s strengths for coping and that some individuals are better able to deal with the middle transition period than others. Although many of the subjects discussed that moving from a structured military life to an unstructured college (civilian) life, they were able to cope based on what they learned as service members. They discussed growing up quickly in the military and taking on responsibilities in their MOS. The structure of military life seemed to still be within them as a coping strategy to become successful and responsible students in college.

**Support:** The military environment provides a structured life for service members. Most participants expressed that there was always someone checking up on them, but in college the opposite exists. Additional responsibilities of a full-time or part-

time job, navigating the college environment, owning a home, and having a family pose a challenge to women veterans. To help women veterans adjust to the institution and provide a somewhat structured environment, Richard Stockton College adheres to the Operation College Promise (OCP) Framework for On-Campus Programming. The OCP Framework consists of 12 key areas whereby the college is compliant in all these areas. Stockton's efforts to support the student veteran population were validated by many women veterans. They described a feeling of mattering; a super friendly environment; caring staff; feeling appreciated; being recognized; veteran lounge; various activities to be involved on campus; and an Office of Veteran Affairs as a point of contact.

**Strategies:** Coping is imperative for adult learners to stay in school. However, each adult learner employs personal coping strategies. Due to the various support services at the college (advising, financial aid, Wellness Center, and Office of Veteran Affairs), women veterans have a support structure to help them move through the institution. Additionally, the Veteran Lounge and Student Veterans Organization are a place for women veterans to connect with their peers (other veterans) to learn about others' coping strategies.

**Moving On: Women Veterans and Making Future Plans. Situation:** Women veterans were not at the end of their college experience; however, there were some indications of future plans beyond graduation. A look at the various college majors reported in this study may be a clue towards future career plans. Reagan was the only participant who spoke of her long term goal of becoming a military psychologist.

**Self:** Reagan sense of self changed as a result of her experience being drugged by a friend and the subsequent disciplinary action taken against her. She also mentioned that she was now motivated to return to school, study psychology, and move on to help others. Her “partying days” were replaced with a new identity that focused on a career.

**Support:** Reagan discussed that she currently lives with her parents. She also expressed talking with other veterans about her experiences in the military. At this time, her current support system is her parents and peers.

**Strategies:** The only indication here is that Reagan plans on taking classes next semester to be on track to graduate on time and move on to graduate school.

### **Transformative Learning Experiences: Military Training and Service**

**Women Veterans’ and their Authentic Stories.** The qualitative method of this study addressed the transformative learning experiences of women veterans. Interview questions one, two, three, seven, and nine were designed to understand women veterans’ authentic stories while in the military and to relate those stories to Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory. Each participant shared a different story; some positive, and others not so positive. Quite “eye-opening” were the struggles and challenges women veterans’ encountered while in the military, but in the end they persevered and learned from those experiences. Additionally, women veterans learned skills in the military that prepared them for the demands of adult life and as college students; some changed socially; many became leaders; one had a worldly education; one experienced sexual assault; one felt that she was expected to fill a “gender-specific role,” and all set personal



and professional goals. Interview participants appeared to experience different transformative learning experiences and at different times during their military service.

Two of the most powerful stories may point to transformative learning experiences in that of Reagan and Zena. To recall, Reagan was faced with a pending dishonorable discharge and Zena was sexually assaulted by a foreign officer in OTS. Although their experiences are different, both may have encountered a transformative learning experience while serving in the military:

Reagan experienced what Mezirow described from his research as a disorienting dilemma that led her to reevaluate her past and undergo a change in perspective (Cranton, 2006). Reagan had been out with a friend who placed a drug in her drink. When her friend told her about this, he immediately contacted the Military Police and Reagan was arrested. She faced an uphill battle, but fought for her honorable discharge, and ensured that she would not lose her G.I. Bill education benefits.

Feeling isolated from others, due to a court martial, this proved an additional challenge for her. She expressed that this experience changed her because she used to “party” a lot. Reagan said, “I was like whatever, I am unstoppable and nothing is ever going to happen to me. Everyone can become a statistic. There are things in this world that they (young students) are not even aware of. I am extremely motivated to be here (in college).”

Perhaps the strongest case for transformative learning here is that Reagan may have engaged in premise reflection-challenging the very basis of the problem or issues she faced while in the military (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 1990). In this case, leaving the

“partying” behind, becoming motivated to attend college, and fighting to preserve the self. Cranton (2006) suggests emancipatory knowledge is an opportunity for the learner to reflect and ask why should I revise or not revise my perspective. As expressed through her interview, it is possible that Reagan’s experience may have led to emancipatory knowledge that changed her perspective on her own life and set her up for success in college and beyond.

The fact that Zena experienced an incident of sexual assault during her training in OTS, and her base commander’s response to it, resembles the current situation women and men face today. This is not to say that all base commanders dismiss allegations of violence towards female and male servicemembers, but yet it happened here. The commander’s anger was displaced on Zena; he blamed her, the victim, for not reporting the incident directly to him. The commander’s behavior led Zena not only to distrust the “higher-ups,” but to also fear those responsible for acting on her behalf. Quite telling is that Zena did not want to report the incident because she was new to the military and did not want to “step on anyone’s toes.” Social Actions took over where the commander failed to do so and that event triggered some sort of “unofficial disciplinary action.” Instead of turning to the “higher ups” for help and protection, Zena found that in the Chaplains. She felt that pastoral care turned her negative experience into a positive one and she was able to move on with her military duties. The foreign officer who essentially committed a crime was never punished. Zena describes what perhaps many of her “sisters” do today-she never heard anything about it again as it “fizzled out.”

In a recent story, *The Washington Post* referenced a Department of Defense report on statistics of sexual assault in the military:

A recent Defense Department report estimated that there were 26,000 incidents of unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault in 2012 but that only a sliver, 3,374, were reported. Advocates say that is because victims think they will be ignored, blamed or retaliated against by officers who either lack training in how to investigate these crimes or don't want to acknowledge problems in their units that could reflect badly on their command. (p. 2)

The controversy over removing the responsibility of commanders to handle sexual assault incidents is currently underway in hearings being conducted in the United States Senate. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff are in favor of keeping with the status quo, Senators are not convinced. They are calling on military prosecutors to take over the responsibility of handling these crimes. United States Allies, Great Britain, Israel and Canada have already removed prosecution of such crimes from the chain of command (<http://www.thewashingtonpost.com>).

It must be noted that not only do women suffer from such heinous crimes and the overall lack of response to it, men suffer as well. According to The Center for American Progress, in 2012, of the 26,000 military personnel estimated to have experienced sexual assault, 14,000 were men and 12,000 were women (Rosenthal & Miller, 2013). The statistics speak for those who have dealt with an experience that deeply wounds them. As the Senate and the Joint Chiefs squabble on this issue, the question remains as to how many others do not report such incidents and remain silent.

Garry Trudeau, the man behind “Doonesbury,” took on military sexual assault in a series of comic strips. In the following comic strip, he brings to light the very issue women in the military face today:



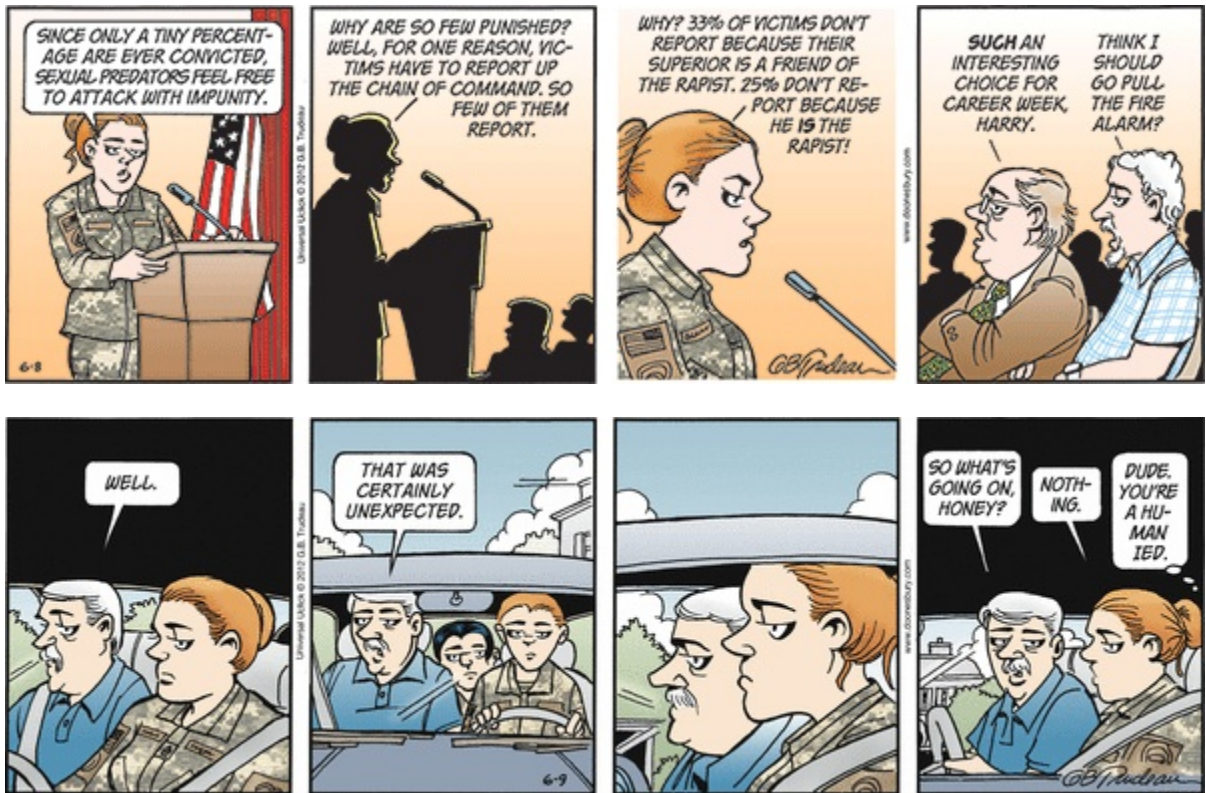


Figure 5.1 Doonesbury Takes on Sexual Assault in the Military

But was this incident a moment in which Zena experienced transformational learning? This supports Mezirow's (2000) distinction between the temporal dimensions of incremental or epochal transformative learning (Cranton, 2006). Zena's experience was a sudden change in perspective—an epochal event in which she quickly learned not to trust the “higher-ups,” but she shifted her sense of trust to the chaplains. This single event was perhaps “a traumatic event that initiates a careful, reasoned explanation of values and beliefs and leads to a changed perspective” (Cranton, 2006, p. 72). Furthermore, she indicated that although this was a negative experience, she was able to be successful in her military career.

Research Question 3: What are the educational and social needs of returning women veterans?

Interview questions four and five addressed the educational and social needs of returning women veterans and question six provided demographics of the qualitative sample population. All six interviewees identified themselves as non-traditional students. They had other responsibilities outside of school, some owned a home, one was raising children, and all lived off campus.

One of the most imperative educational needs for women veterans is to clearly understand their G.I. Bill education benefits. At first, interview participants explained a very challenging and confusing process. Although Sally, Annabelle, and Zena were informed about their benefits prior to attending Stockton, they still had questions that required clarification. They mentioned “Out Processing,” TAP, and unit administrators as the first source of G.I. Bill information and support. When they arrived at Stockton, they were assisted by a financial aid representative and others who were able to further help them understand their G.I. Bill education benefits.

The social needs of women student veterans pointed more towards college activities. In regards to the campus atmosphere, women student veterans either liked it or disliked it. Several themes stood out from the qualitative data that may point to a perception of mattering-peers and administration. Women veterans mentioned feeling connected to administrators, staff, professors, and peers. They also enjoyed activities offered at the college that was geared towards families. Sally said she “felt part of something.” However, others felt disconnected from the campus atmosphere. This was



due in part to the amount of students who commuted to the college and a general sense that students were not involved in clubs. Zena said, “Nobody wants to do anything because they want to go home.”

Research Question 4: How well do women student veterans report that Stockton is meeting those needs?

Interview question eight addressed how well women student veterans report that Stockton is meeting their needs. As of 2013, Richard Stockton College was designated as a Military Friendly School by *GI Jobs Magazine* and meets all criteria for the OCP Framework for On-Campus Programming. The school has an Office of Veteran Affairs as a point of contact; a Veteran Advisory Council; Veterans Mentoring Veterans program; veteran specific for-credit courses; New Student Veterans Orientation; a separate lounge for veterans; Stockton Student Veterans Organization (SVO); an annual Veterans Day event; and various support services that enhance the college experience for the student veteran population. All six interviewees expressed that Stockton is doing a great job in creating and maintaining a veteran friendly atmosphere. They discussed how their transition from the military to Stockton was easy because of caring staff, administration, and the SVO.

For interview question nine, the needs of returning war veterans was discussed. Participants were particularly concerned with mental health needs, handicap access, and the Veterans Administration. One participant shared that the campus needs to be friendlier towards those with physical disabilities. Although the campus is well maintained, there are some obstacles for persons with a physical disability, such as too

many steps or elevators not operable at times. Another participant was concerned about the psychological well-being of returning war veterans and suggested that the college should start a support group for veterans diagnosed with PTSD.

Research Question 5: What recommendations do they make to improve services to women veterans returning to the college environment?

The final interview question probed further for additional information to improve veteran services on campus. Only one subject shared her thoughts. Reagan communicated that more women veterans need to be involved with the SVO. She was also concerned about the amount of technology she needed to know to be successful in college. Additionally, Reagan suggested an introduction to the college system such as understanding holds on her account; her assigned preceptor; how to use Blackboard; and college acronyms.

## **Conclusions**

The research findings support Dahan's (2008) study that women student veterans perceive they matter on campus in all five focus areas-administration, advising, faculty, multiple roles, and peers (Dahan, 2008; Schlossberg et al., 1990). The perception of mattering in each focus area was based on reported mean scores and then compared to Dahan's (2008) findings. Although only nine subjects, as compared to 51 in Dahan's (2008) study, completed the *Veteran Student Survey on Transition into College*, both studies yielded similar results.

The qualitative approach to this study involved 11 interview questions to understand transformative learning experiences, transition experiences, and the



educational and social needs of women student veterans. Dahan (2008) concluded that, when select students were interviewed based on their military background; results showed that they were content with the services provided by the university. However, a few students felt that changes needed to be made for veterans to feel more content with the services provided by the university.

The findings in this study support Dahan's (2008) study that women student veterans are satisfied with veteran specific services on campus. Participants did express a few changes to make the campus more accessible for veterans with physical disabilities and address the mental health needs of veterans with PTSD. Overall, however, women student veterans report that Richard Stockton College is meeting their educational and social needs.

The final area of this study looked at Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. Participants shared that their experience in the military prepared them not only for college, but life in general. They had to grow up quickly in the military, learn new skills, cope with challenges, and take on adult responsibilities. At some point in time, each participant encountered a transformative learning experience that changed them in some way. Virginia reflected on her past partying days and was able to feel a sense of motivation to return to school and set a goal to become a military psychologist. Georgia gained a "worldly education" while deployed overseas. She came in contact with the local people and worked alongside them at the base. Her perspective on another culture changed and she expressed how "good we have it" in the United States. Clearly, there are some telling signs of transformative learning experiences here. As Mezirow (1990)

writes, “By far the most significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection-reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting” (p. 13).

Dahan (2008) determined that based on her research, certain students did not engage in a transformative learning experience due to an overall disconnect with the campus environment. Specifically, subjects in her study communicated that limited social interactions with peers and the larger campus community made them feel out of place. To socialize and connect with others was the major caveat to a transformative learning experience. If that did not occur, then adapting to college after the military was a daunting challenge. To support this finding, Dahan (2008) points to Kelley’s (2001) study that concluded, “the learner’s belief that the social interactive nature of their human service educational experience contributed to their learning and understanding supports the basic characteristics associated with adult education, as well as the teaching theories of Mezirow’s Transformation Learning Theory.” (p. 53)

In this study, adapting to college life in general pointed more towards Schlossberg’s transition framework, mattering study, or a direct transformative learning experience as women veterans’ moved from military service to the higher education environment. Students who feel disconnected from the college or cannot adapt may perceive that they do not matter in one or more of the five focus areas. As noted, the participants in this study shared that military service changed them in some way and as they transitioned into college, this change helped them become successful college

students. They also indicated that the G.I. Bill provided them with the support they needed to transition into their new role as college students.

The legacy of Warren Atherton's grand social experiment known as the G.I. Bill remains today. It is evident in this study that women veterans are taking advantage of the G.I. Bill to further their education and become leaders in their careers, just as they did while in service to the nation. Their predecessors who returned home after WWII faced many social barriers and were ultimately forced back into their roles as mothers, homemakers, and wives-products of the 1950s generation (Humes, 2006). However, unlike their predecessors the women veterans in this study appear to be making progress towards "breaking the glass ceiling" and taking great strides to enhancing their educational goals.

All but one subject (Piper was not eligible for the G.I. Bill because it was not offered at the time of her service after the Vietnam War Era) indicated that they were using their G.I. Bill education benefits to obtain a college degree. Reagan turned her court martial experience into a positive one, and fought to keep her educational future intact; Annabelle discussed that it was important to pass her Army physical fitness test in order to continue taking classes each semester; Zena felt that the money she invested in her education was worth it; and Lola said she appreciated the G.I. Bill because it not only helps her, but other veterans as well.

The current generation of women veterans is more aware of their veteran status and the range of benefits they are entitled to, including education benefits ([www.va.gov/vetdata](http://www.va.gov/vetdata)). As a record number of women veterans return home to use their

G.I. Bill, higher education institutions must be ready to support their educational and social needs and transitions. For some, transition periods may be challenging while others may find it easier to adapt to the college environment. Nevertheless, the opportunity to engage women veterans on campus is ripe. This study only provides a small microcosm of their experiences and questions why only nine out of 30 women veterans participated in the survey and another six in the interview protocol. Is it possible that some women veterans still feel as though they are “the invisible veterans” or perhaps afraid to talk about their military experience? Whatever the reason, encouraging women veterans to share their experiences, whether good or bad, brings their voice into the classroom. As Reagan stated in her interview, “I only met one female veteran. Where are they? What is the reason? Maybe they are scared or intimidated.”

### **Recommendations for Practice**

1. Encourage women veterans to be open and honest about their military experience in the context of higher education and beyond.
2. Provide a technology orientation on the general use of Blackboard.
3. Create an elected SVO officer position for women student veteran representation.
4. Explore partnerships with local and national women veterans’ organizations.
5. Create a support group for all returning war veterans that address emotional and physical issues.
6. Inspect facilities to ensure smooth handicap access to and within the College Center and other areas of the college.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

1. Further research studies should include other four-year institutions in New Jersey to reach a larger sample population to confirm the findings of this study.
2. Conduct a mixed-methods research design study to include women veterans who obtained a college degree during different war eras.
3. This study focused on the following demographics: age; full-time or part-time enrollment in college; academic major; branch of service; military rank; years of service; and G.I. Bill education chapter. Further research should include different demographics such as race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.
4. A study that addresses the experiences of women in the United States Armed Services and a foreign military force where compulsory military service is required.
5. The qualitative approach to this study included six interviews with varied times. Longer time periods and several interviews are necessary to obtain a deeper understanding of women veterans to confirm the findings of this study.

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## **Appendix A**

### Veteran Student Survey on Transition into College

## VETERAN STUDENT SURVEY ON TRANSITION INTO COLLEGE

*Based on the Mattering Survey by Schlossberg, Lasalle, and Golec (1990)*

While your participation in this survey is voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions herein, your cooperation and participation are important to the success of the project and are greatly appreciated. If you choose to participate, please understand that all the responses are strictly confidential and no personally identifiable information is being requested. Your completion of this survey constitutes informed consent and willingness to participate.

**Directions: Please circle the response which best describes your feelings. Please select a response for each item, using the following scale:**

**SD**=Strongly Agree

**D**=Disagree

**N**=Neither Agree nor disagree

**A**=Agree

**SA**=Strongly Agree

1. The administration seems to consider student priorities as important SD D N A SA
2. My advisor doesn't seem to remember things we have discussed before SD D N A SA
3. I will have a hard time finishing my degree because of time limits  
Completing course requirements SD D N A SA
4. I get support from my classmates when I need it SD D N A SA
5. The university's policy of transfer credits penalizes students SD D N A SA
6. My questions seem to put faculty members on the defensive SD D N A SA
7. The faculty and administrators are sensitive to my other responsibilities SD D N A SA
8. I sometimes feel alone and isolated at the university SD D N A SA
9. The administrative rules and regulations are clear to me SD D N A SA
10. My professors interpret assertiveness as a challenge to their authority SD D N A SA
11. The administration sets things up to be easy for them, not the students SD D N A SA

- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| 12. It's hard for me to adjust to the school environment   | SD D N A SA |
| 13. If my advisor doesn't know the answer to my questions, he or she<br>Will seek out the answers  | SD D N A SA |
| 14. The classroom atmosphere encourages me to speak out in class                                   | SD D N A SA |
| 14. I feel my classmates react positively to my experience and knowledge                           | SD D N A SA |
| 15. I feel my classmates react positively to my experience and knowledge                           | SD D N A SA |
| 16. My professors seem to recognize other students but not me                                      | SD D N A SA |
| 17. I don't have time to complete the administrative tasks this institution<br>Requires            | SD D N A SA |
| 18. There has always been someone on campus that could help me when<br>I had a question or problem | SD D N A SA |
| 19. I feel like I fit in my classes  | SD D N A SA |
| 20. The administrative offices are not open at times I need them                                   | SD D N A SA |
| 21. The administration makes efforts to accommodate students                                       | SD D N A SA |
| 22. I have a good relationship with my classmates  | SD D N A SA |
| 23. Sometimes I feel out of place in the classroom   | SD D N A SA |
| 24. The university does no commit enough resources to off-campus<br>Courses                        | SD D N A SA |
| 25. There has always been an advisor available to talk if I have a question                        | SD D N A SA |
| 26. My classmates would help me catch up to the new technologies if I<br>Need it                   | SD D N A SA |
| 27. My experience-based comments are accepted by my professors                                     | SD D N A SA |

28. It takes too long to register or correct registration problems	SD D N A SA
29. Administrative staff is helpful in answering my questions	SD D N A SA
30. Fellow students don't seem to listen to me when I share my Experiences	SD D N A SA
31. Unless I have another student like me in class, no one really Understands how hard it is to be here	SD D N A SA
32. The university offers alternatives to the traditional semester-length Courses	SD D N A SA
33. I have had adequate opportunities to get to know my fellow students	SD D N A SA
34. Campus rules and regulations seem to have been made for someone Other than me	SD D N A SA
35. My age sometimes gets in the way of my interactions with other Students	SD D N A SA
36. Some of the jokes my professors tell me make me feel uncomfortable	SD D N A SA
37. Classes are offered at times that are good for me	SD D N A SA
38. I feel welcome on campus	SD D N A SA
39. The classroom desks are uncomfortable	SD D N A SA
40. I feel my activity fees are spent in a way that is meaningful to me	SD D N A SA
41. My advisor has office hours at times I am on campus	SD D N A SA
42. Departmental rules sometimes make my goals difficult or impossible	SD D N A SA
43. The school newspaper doesn't discuss student issues that are relevant To me	SD D N A SA
44. My professors sometimes ignore my comments or questions	SD D N A SA

45. I sometimes feel my professors want me to hurry up and finish  
Speaking

SD D N A SA

*Source:* Schlossberg, N., Lasalle, A., & Golec, R. (1990). *The mattering scales for adults in postsecondary education*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education. ERIC ED 341 722.

## **Appendix B**

### Demographics Form

## **Demographic Information**

Please take some time to fill out the below information. Thank you for your time.

Age (please circle one):

21-23

24-26

27-29

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Full-time student (12 or more credits)

Part-time student (1-11 credits)

Current Academic Major:

Branch of Service (please circle one):

Air Force

Army

Coast Guard

Marines

Navy

Rank (please do not use acronyms for your rank):

Years of service:

G.I. Bill Chapter (please circle one):

1606

30

31

33

Other: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix C**

### Interview Questions for Veteran Students

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR VETERAN STUDENTS

**Please answer the following question as detailed as possible and to the best of your ability.**

1. How do you feel about returning to college, or going to college after being in the military?
2. Can you please describe to me your past military experience, i.e., what branch of the military, if you went out of the country?
3. Do you find that having been in the military differentiates you from other college students, why or why not?
4. Discussing the G.I. Bill, was it difficult for you to understand what it offered and how to access those services?
5. With regards to campus, how do you like the campus atmosphere? Why or why or not?
6. Are you a traditional student, i.e. do you live on campus, are you a full-time student, and maybe have a part-time job, or other? Please specify.
7. Do you feel as though the military prepared you for college life?
8. What should Richard Stockton College provide in services, to help your time on campus be more veteran friendly?
9. How can the needs of returning war veterans be better met?
10. Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to inform me of? Do you have any questions?

*Source:* Dahan, J. (2008). Military veterans in higher education: application of adult development theories to selected rowan university undergraduate veterans. Glassboro, NJ: Rowan University, 1-70.

## **Appendix D**

### **Institutional Review Board Approval Letter**



February 27, 2013

Jeffrey Kurz  
3103 Falcon Court  
Mays Landing, NJ 08330

Dear Jeffrey Kurz:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your project:

IRB application number: 2013-157

Project Title: Women Veterans in Higher Education: Transitions and Transformative Learning Experiences

In accordance with federal law, this approval is effective for **one calendar year** from the date of this letter. If your research project extends beyond that date or if you need to make significant modifications to your study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Please retain copies of consent forms for this research for three years after completion of the research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman ([hartman@rowan.edu](mailto:hartman@rowan.edu) or call 856-256-4500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Shreekanth Mandayam, Associate Provost for Research ([shreek@rowan.edu](mailto:shreek@rowan.edu) or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser ([heiser@rowan.edu](mailto:heiser@rowan.edu) or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harriet Hartman".

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.  
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Burton Sisco, Educational Services, Administration, Higher Education, James Hall

Office of Research  
Bole Hall  
201 Mullica Hill Road  
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701

856-256-5150  
856-256-4425 fax

## **Appendix E**

Approval of the Assistant Dean of Students

Office of Veteran Affairs  
Division of Student Affairs

Ph: 609.652.4315  
Fax: 609.626.5550



101 Vera King Farris Drive  
Pomona, New Jersey 08205  
[www.stockton.edu/veteranaffairs](http://www.stockton.edu/veteranaffairs)

THE RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

March 11, 2013

Rowan University  
Institutional Review Board  
201 Mullica Hill Road  
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Re: Jeffrey Kurz

To Whom It May Concern:

Please be advised that Mr. Kurz and I have discussed his research project "Women Veterans: Transition and Transformative Learning Experiences" at great length.

I grant Mr. Jeffrey Kurz permission to conduct research with our women veterans at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey during the spring 2013 semester.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at [tom.odonnell@stockton.edu](mailto:tom.odonnell@stockton.edu) or by telephone at 609-652-4676.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom O'Donnell", written over a horizontal line.

Thomas J. O'Donnell  
Assistant Dean of Students  
Veteran Affairs and Leadership Studies

## **Appendix F**

### Consent Forms

**Consent Form**

I agree to participate in a study entitled “Women Veterans in Higher Education: Transitions and Transformative Learning Experiences” which is being conducted by Jeffrey Kurz, to fulfill the thesis requirements for the Educational Services, Administration & Higher Education Department, Rowan University. I attest that I am 18 years of age or older.

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of women veterans. Specifically, the study will focus on the transition, educational, and transformational learning experiences of women veterans in higher education. The findings of this research will be used in a thesis requirement for the Master’s degree in Higher Education Administration.

I understand that I will be required to complete a survey consisting of 45 questions and to (possibly) participate in a follow-up interview. My participation in the survey should not exceed 20 minutes.

I understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time and without penalty.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, please contact Jeffrey Kurz, Primary Investigator, at omaha29@msn.com or at 732-275-4247 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Burton R. Sisco at (856) 256-4500 ext. 3717 or at sisco@rowan.edu.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_

Date



**Tape Recording Consent Form**

Rowan University  
Principle Investigator: Jeffrey Kurz  
M.A., Higher Education Administration, Candidate  
Educational Services, Administration, & Higher Education Department

By signing this form, I provide consent to be taped in order to ensure the accuracy of responses provided in the interviews. The interviews will take place at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, Office of Veteran Affairs/Conference Room and all sessions will be taped. The tapes will be used for the purpose of data collection and as part of a requirement for my Master's thesis. Any data used for the purposes of this research will be confidentially maintained with the use of pseudonyms or the use of fictional names. Upon completion of the research study, all tape recordings will be destroyed or removed by deletion software. I attest that I am 18 years of age or older.

I understand that there are minimal physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time and without penalty.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact Jeffrey Kurz, Primary Investigator, at omaha29@msn.com or at 732-275-4247 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Burton R. Sisco at (856) 256-4500 ext. 3717 or at sisco@rowan.edu

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Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

---

Date

## **Appendix G**

### Debriefing Form

**Debriefing Form**  
**Rowan University**  
**201 Mullica Hill Road**  
**Glassboro, NJ 08028**

Thank you for your participation in my study! Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

**Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of the study was to evaluate women veterans' transitions and transformative learning experiences upon return from the armed services to a four-year college environment. Research focused on variables such as participants' attitudes of the institution serving their unique educational needs, lived experiences while in the military, and transformative learning and transition experiences in relation to military service and enrollment in college.

Furthermore, the goal of the study was to replicate Dahan's (2008) study on student veterans' enrolled at Rowan University. The instrument that was used to assess student veteran transitions into college was based on the "*Mattering Survey*" by Schlossberg, Lassalle, and Golec (1990) and interview questions on transformative learning was based on Dahan's (2008) "*Interview Questions for Student Veterans*." For this study, the "*Mattering Survey*" was completed by all women veteran students who volunteered to do so. The "*Mattering Survey*" was completed at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey/Office of Veteran Affairs Conference Room. "*Interview Questions for Student Veterans*" was used during a formal interview process conducted at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey/Office of Veteran Affairs Conference Room. Interviews were conducted with all women veteran students who volunteered to do so.

**Goal of the Research:**

The goal of the research was to understand women veterans' transitions and transformative learning experiences. The following research questions were addressed in the study (hypotheses):

1. What do selected Richard Stockton College women student veterans report regarding the five focus areas of mattering on the college campus?
2. What are the transformative learning and transition experiences of women student veterans?
3. What are the educational and social needs of returning women veterans?
4. How well do women student veterans report that Stockton is meeting those needs?
5. What recommendations do they make to improve services to women veterans returning to the college environment?

**We realize that some of the questions asked may have provoked strong emotional reactions. As researchers, we do not provide mental health services and we will not be following up with you after the study. However, we want to provide every participant in this study with a comprehensive and accurate list of clinical resources that are available, should you decide you need assistance at any time. Please see information pertaining to local resources at the end of this form.**

**Confidentiality:**

You may decide that you do not want your data used in this research. If you would like your data removed from the study and permanently deleted, please send an email to this email address: omaha29@msn.com, listing your name in the body of the email, and include in the subject line the following: Please remove my data from the study

Whether you agree or do not agree to have your data used for this study, you will still receive a \$5.00 gift card to Wawa for your participation.

Please do not disclose research procedures and/or hypotheses to anyone who might participate in this study in the future as this could affect the results of the study.

**Final Report:**

If you would like to receive a copy of the final report of this study (or a summary of the findings) when it is completed, please feel free to contact us (see next page for contact information).

**Contact Information:**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact me or my faculty advisor:

Jeffrey Kurz, Primary Investigator

**E-mail:** [omaha29@msn.com](mailto:omaha29@msn.com)

**Phone:** 732-275-4247

Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

Faculty Advisor

Rowan University

The Department of Educational Services, Administration, and Higher Education

201 Mullica Hill Road

Glassboro, NJ 08028-4058

**E-mail:** [sisco@rowan.edu](mailto:sisco@rowan.edu)

**Phone:** 856-256-4500 x3717

If you have other concerns about the study and would like to contact someone not directly involved in the research study, please contact Associate Provost for Research, Shreekanth Mandayam, at (856) 256-5333.

**If you feel upset after having completed the study or find that some questions or aspects of the study triggered distress, talking with a qualified clinician may help. If you feel you would like assistance please contact:**

**Laurie A. Dutton, MA, LPC, LCADC, DRCC, Associate Director of Counseling Services, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, 101 Vera King Farris Drive, J-204, Galloway, NJ 08205, 609-652-4722**

**Thank you again for your participation!**

## **Appendix H**

### Rules and Procedures for Logical Analysis of Written Data

## RULES AND PROCEDURES FOR LOGICAL ANALYSIS OF WRITTEN DATA

The following decisions were made regarding what was to be the unit of data analysis (Sisco, 1981)

1. A phrase or clause will be the basic unit of analysis.
2. Verbiage not considered essential to the phrase or clause will be edited out—e.g., articles of speech, possessives, some adjectives, elaborative examples.
3. Where there is a violation of convention syntax in the data, it will be corrected.
4. Where there are compound thoughts in a phrase or clause, each unit of thought will be represented separately (unless one was an elaboration of the other).
5. Where information seems important to add to the statement in order to clarify it in a context, this information will be added to the unit by using parentheses.

The following decisions were made regarding the procedures for categorization of context units:

1. After several units are listed on a sheet of paper, they will be scanned in order to determine differences and similarities.
2. From this tentative analysis, logical categories will be derived for the units.
3. When additional units of data suggest further categories, they will be added to the classification scheme.
4. After all the units from a particular question responses are thus classified, the categories are further reduced to broader clusters (collapsing of categories).
5. Frequencies of units in each cluster category are determined and further analysis steps are undertaken, depending on the nature of the data—i.e.,

ranking of categories with verbatim quotes which represent the range of ideas or opinions (p.177).